

THE YOUNG PIONEERS



BY



E. EVERETT-GREEN

OR WITH LA SALLE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

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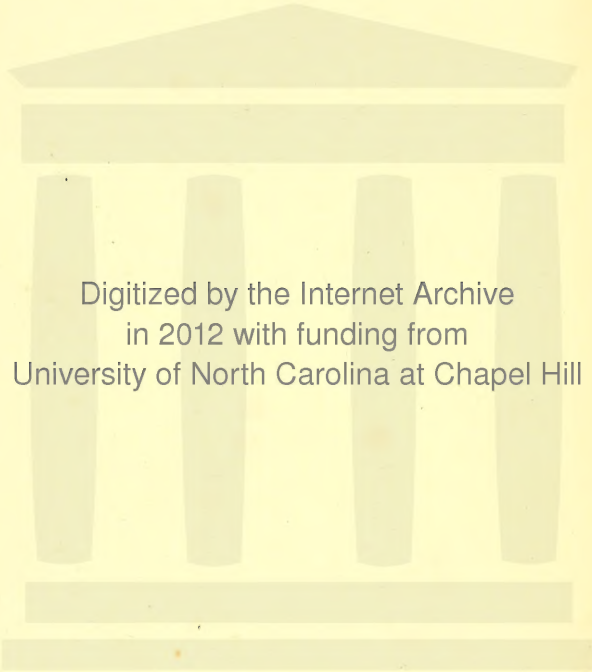
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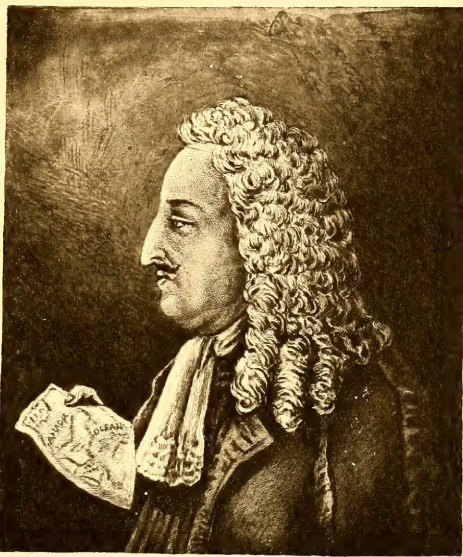
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THE
YOUNG PIONEERS

OR

WITH LA SALLE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

BY

Evelyn Everett=Green

Author of "In Taunton Town," "In the Days of Chivalry,"
"Shut In," "The Secret Chamber at Chad,"
"The Church and the King,"
&c. &c.



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THE YOUNG PIONEERS.

CHAPTER I.

A PERSECUTED FAMILY.

“MY sons,” said the father, with a look of care upon his dark face, “the time has come when I must speak to you of many things. Let us lay upon the grave of our dear one this tribute of our affection, and here let us drop tears together upon her last resting-place; for God in heaven alone doth know whether we shall ever again stand upon this sacred spot.”

The man who spoke these words uttered them under stress of visible emotion, and the three lads who stood beside him at the newly-made grave regarded him with glances of astonishment and questioning curiosity.

Seeing his bent head, and marking the heaving breast and tear-dimmed eyes, they spoke no words to him at first, but drew a little apart together and looked at one another in mute wonder.

“What can he mean, Jules?” asked blue-eyed Claude, who regarded his strong and manly eldest brother as

only next to his father in wisdom and knowledge; but Jules shook his head, keeping a watchful eye upon his parent, and it was Gaspard who alone volunteered the expression of an opinion, though he did not raise his voice above a whisper.

“It is those accursed Bayfords and their everlasting taunts of Popery,” and the lad’s eyes flashed fiercely as he spoke. “Old Margaret told me they would never rest till they had driven us away. Popery indeed! As if the whole world might not know, forsooth, that our fathers were driven forth from France because they would none of such accursed idolatry! A plague upon those lying knaves who strive to turn all our neighbours against us! Have we not lived in peace amongst them these many years? Why should they seek to do us hurt?”

Jules shook his head gravely. He was somewhat taciturn by nature, and did not readily give vent to the feelings within him. He had the same type of face as his father, dark and thin and brown. The French blood which ran in his veins was easily detected at a glance, although he had never set foot out of England. He was seventeen years old, but looked almost more. His brothers, although little younger—Gaspard being sixteen, and Claude fifteen—always regarded him rather as their father’s companion than as their own.

“The boys shouted after me to-day, and called me ‘dog of a French Papist!’” said Claude, whose fair open face, golden hair, and deep blue eyes looked far more

Saxon or Teutonic than Gallic. "Why do they say such things of us? What have we done to anger them?"

"Nothing," answered Gaspard, with restrained passion in his voice and gesture. "It is naught that we have done or have not done. It is the covetous envy of those evil Bayfords. Long have they looked with jealous eyes upon our prosperous little holding. Long have they desired to possess it for their own. And since we live quiet and peaceable lives, and do hurt to none, and give no cause of offence, so that they can find no occasion against us, they seek to raise against us this cry of 'Popery!' As though all men might not know that it was for being Huguenots and haters of Popery that our fathers were driven forth from France, and forced to take refuge here on English soil."

Gaspard was plainly the most passionate and excitable of the three brothers. He was also an exceedingly handsome lad. His eyes were very dark—as dark as those of Jules—but his hair was a bright chestnut colour, very thick and waving, falling upon his shoulders in heavy natural curls. His complexion, too, was fair, although his skin was deeply embrowned by exposure to the sun and air. His frame was sinewy and muscular, rather spare, but with a strength and breadth of proportion which gave promise of abundant vigour as the lad developed into the man. It was in his quick, excitable gestures, and the scintillating flash of his eyes, that he showed most plainly his foreign origin. All three boys spoke English and French with equal ease

and fluency. Their English mother had desired that they should not forget their father's tongue, and although that father had spent the greater part of his life in England, the language of his native country was still sweet to him. When alone with his sons he generally addressed them in French.

The family history of the Dautrays had been for many generations a chequered one.

A century before, after the awful massacre of St. Bartholomew and its attendant horrors throughout the length and breadth of France, one Jean Dautray with his whole family had fled for refuge to England, having barely escaped with his life, since he was known for a very staunch Huguenot. He had settled in the county of Southampton, as Hampshire was then termed, and had taken a small holding in the New Forest, not far from the ancient abbey and small town of Romsey. Here there had been Dautrays ever since, but they were a dwindling race; for they had not taken altogether kindly to the new soil and climate, although in worldly matters they had prospered.

The Dautrays who remained behind in France, preferring the uncertainties and perils of spasmodic persecutions and spasmodic peace to exile in a foreign country, had kept up a desultory correspondence with their kinsmen across the water, and from time to time an English-born Dautray would migrate to France, or a French-born Dautray would visit his relatives in England for a longer or shorter period.

Jean Dautray, the father of these three lads, was one of the latter. He had crossed the water as a young man to visit his uncle in England, had found the old man failing and lonely, had gradually stepped into the position of son to him, and had finally married an English wife, and settled upon the little farm, which prospered under his thrifty care, and finally became altogether his own. His family was now the last of the Dautrays living in these parts. The little colony had broken up and dispersed. Some had returned to France hoping better things after the power of the Medicis was finally broken; others had drifted away to other parts of England; and the time had come when it appeared likely that even Jean and his three sons would soon cease to be aught but a memory in the place.

The second Charles was upon the throne, and the country was in that miserable state of faction when no man knew from day to day whether he were safe or no, and the favourites of one week might be the hunted victims of the next.

The reaction from the tyranny of the Puritan code had brought about during the early years of Charles's reign a strong reaction in favour not only of Episcopacy, but even in some quarters of the hated Popery itself. The king's leanings towards his mother's creed were more than suspected, and the cowed and persecuted Romanists were beginning to raise their heads once more.

Then followed yet another reaction. The cry was

raised that the Papists were plotting untold mischief against the king and the people. A meaningless scare seized upon the nation. All manner of outrages were perpetrated in the name of justice. Victims of every degree were pounced upon. Blood flowed freely. The whole nation was in a panic. And although in the remoter districts of the country the excitement was comparatively little felt, yet it extended everywhere, and was making itself felt here in this little village where the Dautrays had lived so long.

There has always been a connection in the English peasant mind between a Frenchman and a Papist. It survives to the present day, and in the seventeenth century it was strong in its intensity. It mattered not that the Dautrays had lived amongst them as Protestants for generations—that they had been driven into exile originally for their repudiation of Popery. There was a stubborn, unconvincible conviction in the minds of the peasants that foreigners were all Papists at heart, and the fact that Jean Dautray had not been born on English soil, but had come across the water as a young man, was quite enough to condemn him for a Papist in spite of any asseverations on his part. So long as his English wife had lived he was comparatively free from annoyance, as she had been a woman much beloved. But she had died two months ago. Ever since that event a change had been creeping over Dautray's neighbours. He had long known that some amongst these regarded him with envy and malice, and now, when a perfect

scare was running through the country, and every hapless Romanist was in danger of his life, the mere charge of Popery, even against a quiet and conforming and law-abiding citizen, was a source of considerable danger ; and Dautray had been aware for some days of the mutterings of a storm which he believed would soon burst over his head.

Nor were the boys unaware of the change which had begun to show itself in those about them. Their French origin had always made something of a barrier between them and their comrades in the village. They had been accustomed all their lives to be twitted for their outlandish ways and speech. They had taken refuge in a sort of proud defiance, and had as a natural result clung all the closer to their French parent, who was so slightly spoken of ; whilst their mother always encouraged them to be proud of their Huguenot ancestors, and to think it no shame to be called Frenchmen. She always looked forward to the possibility of a return to Jean's native land, and therefore she herself learned her husband's tongue, and encouraged the boys to talk it freely at home.

Nevertheless so long as she lived, the incipient persecution did not assume great proportions. It had served to make Dautray a very cautious and saving man. He had a carefully laid-up hoard of gold pieces upon which he could lay hand at any moment. He never tried to increase the boundaries of his holding, though he might have done so, feeling that it was better policy to have

gold, laid by ready for an emergency. His eyes had been turned towards France once again with a certain feeling of longing. True, he had heard much of oppressive taxation, and a starving and ruined peasantry; but for all that his mind was beginning to turn back with a sense of longing towards his native soil. He had never become quite reconciled to England. Surely there was some other land beyond those fog-bound seas where liberty and life and freedom from persecution could be enjoyed; and since his wife lay in her grave, what tie had he now with the shores of England?

And yet, because we are creatures of habit, and the associations of many years are not easily set aside, Dautray's tears were dropping fast as he knelt beside the grave of his wife, and thought of leaving the country which had been so long his home.

The boys, standing a little apart and watching him with excited curiosity, ceased talking amongst themselves in the anxiety to hear him speak. Surely he would follow up those first words of his by some others. For a long time—even before their mother's death—the lads had been certain that something was upon their father's mind. Now he had begun to speak of coming change. Surely he would tell them more!

Their supposition was a right one. Dautray had every intention of opening his heart to his sons. If he had given way to a passion of sorrow in the yearning memories which surrounded his dearly-loved wife, and their great loss sustained at her death, it was not for

long that he thus succumbed to despair. Laying upon the mound which covered her mortal remains the wreath of flowers they had brought, he rose from his knees, wiped away his tears, and then turned towards the expectant boys.

“My sons,” he said, speaking in his own tongue to them, “the time has come when I must talk with you of many things. But first let me ask of you a question. In England you were born; here in England have you been reared. Tell me, is this land very dear to you? Now that our loved one has been taken away, would it grieve you much to quit this place and go forth into the world?”

As usual, when the three brothers were addressed, Gaspard was the first to find tongue. His dark eyes flashed and dilated, his voice was eager and excited as he made reply,—

“To go forth into the wide world has always been my dream, my father,” he answered. “Many a time and oft, when I have gone down with thee to the town of Southampton, and have seen the great ships, and have heard the wondrous stories of the men who have sailed over the wide sea and seen strange lands and wonders which are like dreams to us, I have longed—ah, how unspeakably I have longed!—to take ship and go forth with them. O father, dear father, England is no home for us now. We are not loved of our neighbours. Men call us evil names, and look askance at us. Let us shake the dust from off our feet as a testimony against

them, and let us go forth and see those great sights and those wondrous lands of which all men are now dreaming, but which are in truth no dream to those who can do and dare !”

The boy's eyes were glowing with the fire of his great desire, and Claude, excited by the look of his brother's face, and by the tones in his quivering voice, flung his arms about his father's neck, and cried out,—

“ Ah, dearest father ! let us even do as Gaspard says. We have talked of it so oft together, he and I—of those wondrous lands where flowers grow like trees, and where the birds are painted with every hue of the rainbow, where gold and pearls are to be picked up like pebbles, and where fruit grows in such abundance that men need no other food ! Ah, let us leave these leaden skies and long chill winters, and live in a land where there is always sunshine, and where wonders never cease ! Let us fare forth there, my father ! England is no place for us now !”

Dautray could not but smile at the fervid language of his boys ; yet the lines of care smoothed themselves out from his brow as he learned how small a sacrifice it would be to his children to quit the land of their birth.

“ And thou, Jules, what sayest thou ?” he asked, turning his eyes towards his firstborn.

“ I am willing to go anywhere with you and the boys, my father,” answered the silent one. “ It has long seemed to me that England is not our home.”

“ That I have felt myself,” said Dautray quietly ;

“and, if I mistake not, we are in peril at this present time from the covetous malice of Henry Bayford. Long has he desired our holding. Long has it been to him as Naboth’s vineyard to the wicked Ahab. He will surely seek the first occasion against us to drive us forth, if not to slay us. It were better to save such things as we may, and to go forth of our own free will, than to be driven forth, perhaps with danger to our liberties or our lives.”

“Oh yes, father, yes,” cried Claude, with eager, nervous insistence. “Why should we linger? why should we wait? They cry after us in the streets, and hoot us as we pass by. Robert, the hunchback, called after me that he would set me in the pillory and slice off my ears for a Papist cur. They tell horrid tales in the town about how they serve all those whom they call Papist, whether they be so in truth or no. Why should we stay in face of so many dangers, when we long to be away?”

There was fear as well as eagerness in the face of the fair-haired Claude. He had all Gaspard’s vividness of imagination, without his personal scorn of danger. The village hunchback, partly in malice, partly in love of his horrid subject, had told Claude many a gruesome tale of the savage punishments inflicted upon the victims of popular fury in these lawless and tyrannical days, and the boy’s blood had sometimes run chill with apprehension lest such a fate might await him. He was eager to leave behind a country which had come to be

a prison to him ; but Dautray knew that France was no land of peace or liberty, and to return to his friends there might be but a small gain.

Something of this he spoke to his sons, standing there beside the mother's grave ; but Gaspard made quick and eager response.

“ But, my father, why go to France ? Why stay at all in these regions of monarchs and their tyranny, when the whole world of the great West lies before us ? Are there not new worlds of wonders being daily discovered ? Have we not heard stories which have fired our blood, and which have made us long and yearn to follow the setting sun, and see the glories upon which he looks ? Other men have gone to the Far West and seen these untold wonders—then why not we ? ”

But Dautray shook his head dubiously, although he did not altogether seek to quench the fire of his son's enthusiasm.

“ Ah, Gaspard,” he said, “ many have dreamed such dreams in their youth, who have lived to wish them undreamed. The corpses of hundreds, if not thousands, of our bold countrymen are now strewing the shores and forests of those trackless regions in which men have sought to found an asylum for themselves. It is a noble aim ; but it needs careful thought and much preparation ere men may venture forth over unknown seas and into those vast regions of savage life. Those that return be few as compared with those who perish unknown and unheard of. Believe me, my son, I speak

not without knowledge. France has long been sending forth her sons to seek a foothold in these vast lands beyond the setting sun; but there has been more of disaster than of glory or success as yet in the attempt."

"Nay, father, say not so!" cried Claude, with eager denial; "Gaspard and I have talked to the sailors so oft, and they say—"

"Ah, my son, when a man is safely home from a perilous voyage, with money perchance in his pocket and the dangers far behind, he is wont to speak brave swelling words of the wonders he has seen, and doubtless the wonders are many and great. But the founding of new countries away beyond the seas in savage regions is a task that needs much foresight and skill. I say not, my sons, that my own heart does not yearn for such an asylum of peace and liberty; but I know well that for us to seek it alone and unprepared would mean nothing but death and disaster to all."

The faces of the younger boys fell, but Jules remarked with a quiet confidence of manner,—

"The father speaks no more than the truth. We must seek to ally ourselves with others, ere we can adventure such a thing."

"But how? and with whom?" asked Gaspard, the impetuous.

"With our brethren in France," answered Dautray quickly. "Dost thou remember thine uncle who visited us ten years ago now? He told me many things of what France was doing out in the great new world

of the West. The king sends every year ships and men to seek to establish a kingdom of New France in that vast land, the limits of which no man knows as yet. Thine uncle had some thoughts of joining with those who were going thither. By this time he may have done so, but I have heard nothing of him for long. But whatever he may have done, whatever may have befallen him, the fact remains that, if we take ship for France—for La Rochelle, where our brethren of the faith have always their stronghold—we shall hear more of this venture. We shall ask of our countrymen how it prospers, and if it be the will of Heaven, we shall ourselves, instead of striving to make a home upon French soil, go forth with the next expedition and seek an asylum in that New France beyond the seas. A while back the king gave grants of land and money and many good things to all who would go forth and settle there and build him up a kingdom. Doubtless he may be doing the same now, and we may live to thrive and be rich across the ocean.”

The boys hung upon their father’s words with eager attention.

Gaspard broke into excited speech.

“To grow rich is nothing—I care not for that! I want to see, to live, to know! I want to tread where foot of man never trod before! I want to see what eye of man has never looked upon as yet! O father, sweet father, let us waste no longer our lives in this place which treats us ever like strangers and foes! Let

us go to France and learn what our brethren there are doing, and then away, away, away to the West, to the land which lies beyond the setting sun!"

The father could not but smile at the eager enthusiasm of the son; but his own quick blood was fired to no small degree by the eagerness of his boys, and by the pleading look in Claude's blue eyes. Claude had his mother's sunny face and azure eyes, and was perhaps the dearest to his father on that account; but Jules was to him as a pillar of strength. Man though he was, he often asked the counsel of his silent son, who seemed to have inherited a large portion of English stability and coolness of head, albeit, to look at, he was the most French-like of the three boys.

"And what sayest thou, Jules, my son?" he said, taking the arm of the silent youth, as they all turned away from the grave and took the homeward path.

"I am willing with all my heart to quit this land," answered Jules, with an instinctive glance around him; "for in truth I have begun to say to myself that neither our goods nor our lives are altogether safe. People have looked askance at us for weeks. When a fire smoulders, it needs but a puff of wind and the whole bursts into a flame."

"I know it," answered the father; "I have felt it long. That is why I have been making quietly ready, even before thy mother died. When the doctor told me that he could do no cure upon her, and that she would but linger on awhile and die, I felt that our death-

blow was struck. England would be no place for us when she was taken. And that is why I sold three of the horses so soon as the hay was cut, and why I let our enemy, Henry Bayford, purchase my standing crops for less than their true value. I knew that he would but have set himself to ruin me had I thwarted him, and I said within my heart, ‘The money will be more to me than corn which I and mine will not be here to eat.’ And so I have parted with many things, always keeping this thing in mind—that we should not long be here. And now my plans are wellnigh accomplished, and methinks that it is time. I carry my money always about me in a belt next to my person. It is something heavy just now, but so I feel it safe. If sudden peril menace us, I have no need to go into the house for anything. As in the Scriptures a man was warned to flee on the instant from the coming destruction, so have I been ready these many weeks for a sudden alarm. To-morrow I go to Henry Bayford, and offer him the farm and holding at a low price. Then I am ready to depart on the instant. I hear the whole country is in a tumult against all suspected of Popery. If Bayford chooses to brand us as such, our very lives may be at his mercy.”

Jules made a sign of assent. He had felt that for many a day. Speaking little as he moved about his daily duties, he heard perhaps the more. He had long known that there was a vague but growing hostility against his father and themselves, fomented by their

covetous neighbour. Any pretext would be made to stand as excuse for some aggressive act. It was good, he felt, that all was ready for a speedy flight.

The last of the long summer daylight was waning as the little party turned their steps through the recesses of the forest towards the little village nestling in the wood, where they had dwelt so long. They had been at work through the long hours of the day, at their accustomed toil, and only after supper had taken their way to the old abbey graveyard, where their dear one lay.

Gaspard and Claude were walking some way in advance, when suddenly Dautray and Jules saw Claude come rushing back towards them with a white and terrified face.

“O father! O Jules!” he cried, “there is *such* a fire! And Gaspard says—Oh, I can’t believe it!—Gaspard says it is our home that is burning!”

Jules sprang forward like an arrow from a bow. Dautray caught at Claude’s arm to hinder him from doing the like.

“Stay with me, my child,” he said. “Where is Gaspard gone?”

“To see if he was right, father. O father, dost thou think it can be true?”

CHAPTER II.

FLIGHT.

DAUTRAY laid a firm hand upon the arm of Claude, whilst still hastening his steps towards the clearing in which stood the little village of which he was a member.

As he approached the fringe of the forest, the sound of voices raised in angry shouting could be distinctly heard, whilst the red gleam of fire could be plainly seen through the trees.

“My God! it is indeed our home!” cried the father, as he pushed towards the clearing.

Claude was trembling all over in excitement, fear, and indignation.

“My father, my father, why do they treat us thus?” he cried. “Surely the God of heaven will avenge!”

“At least we must trust the word of Him who says, ‘Vengeance is mine—I will repay,’” answered the father, suppressing a groan; and then pausing for a moment, and laying his hand upon the arm of his son, he added very seriously,—

“Claude, wilt thou obey me?”

The boy's blue eyes expressed wonder and questioning reproach.

“Do I not ever obey thee, my father?” he asked.

“Yes, verily, my son; but to-night I ask a hard thing of thee. Thou must leave me this instant. Thou must not approach yon shouting and hooting crowd. Take the winding path through the wood, and go seek old Margaret's cottage. There wilt thou find a safe asylum until this fury be overpast. There will I come and seek thee when we have seen if aught can be done to save our home and our goods from this sudden destruction. She has always been our friend. She will give thee shelter, and no man will dare molest thee beneath her roof. Go, my son, there is no time to lose—go, and the Lord be with thee! If thou shouldst see thy father's face no more, cherish his memory.”

The tears had sprung to Claude's eyes. He fell upon his father's neck, and cried,—

“Send me not away from thy side, my father. If we must indeed die, let us all die together!”

“Nay, but let us rather live!” cried Dautray, with a sudden flash of fire in his eyes. “It is because I would live that I send thee from my side. Alone I can fight, and thy brothers also. But thou art but a stripling; thou mightest hinder us and receive some deadly injury. Do then as I bid thee, boy. I know that obedience is hard, but it shall one day find its reward. Go, my son, for I may not linger longer here.

Thy brothers may even now be in sore need of my sustaining arm."

It was a hard thing that the father had asked of his high-spirited young son, but Claude had pledged his word, and he did not yield to temptation. Choking down a sob in his throat, he turned upon the instant, and took the winding path which would lead him in time to the lonely cabin where dwelt a friendly woman somewhat feared in the neighbourhood as a witch, albeit, since her art was exercised mainly in the task of healing, she was respected and well thought of, although her presence inspired a certain amount of awe.

Having seen his youngest, and perhaps best beloved, son (for Claude's likeness to his dead mother made him very dear to Dautray's heart) on his way to a place of safety, the man himself made straight for the village, and for his burning homestead. As he dashed through the scattered groups of gaping peasants, voices yelled, and sometimes a stone flew past him, in somewhat close proximity to his head.

"There goes another of them! Down with all Papists! Catch him! Hang him! String them all up together on one tree! A curse upon their vile plottings! Down with every Papist in the kingdom!"

These were the cries which rent the air as Dautray dashed past; but nobody actually put forth a hand against him. Evidently something had occurred to disturb and inflame the populace of the little place, though

it was not yet sufficient to rouse them to more than hard words against their neighbour.

But as Daustray ran towards the scene of the conflagration, it was plain that a more evil spirit was abroad amongst those who had gathered about his flaming homestead. Full in the glare of the fire stood the massive figure of his old enemy, Henry Bayford, and this man was shouting to those about to plunder and destroy, hounding on all the worst characters of the place to wreak a senseless vengeance upon all on which they could lay destructive hands.

“Down with the Papists and their foul plots!” he yelled, just as Daustray came up. “Down with them, every one! Destroy them root and branch. Let the place that knew them know them no more. Fall upon them with fire and sword. They would destroy the nation with their foul plots. Let them be destroyed without mercy wherever they be found!”

Such language addressed to all the wild youths of the neighbourhood, and all the idle vagabonds who had collected to see the fire, acted like a fan upon smouldering fire.

The whole country was seething with rumours of some great popish plot. Nothing definite was known, but everybody was ready to raise the cry against the Papists. Daustray was as stanch a Protestant as could be found in the realm, but he was a Frenchman, and that was enough for his foes. They greeted his appearance with yells of rage and fury, and

made a rush at him, waving their staffs over their heads.

But Dautray was no coward, neither was he unprepared for sudden assault. He had had warnings that his life might not be safe in case of any sudden uprising of popular hatred, such as this. In a moment he had whipped out from under his doublet a long knife, the blade of which flashed in the firelight as he brandished it above his head, with a menacing gleam. Those who had rushed upon him drew suddenly back, and he planted himself with his back to a tree, and looked steadily round him.

“Who wishes to fight me?” he asked.

There was a great sound of hooting, but nobody answered the challenge, and Dautray, still regarding the ring of flushed and angry faces round him, asked once more,—

“Which of you have I ever injured?”

Again there was a storm of hooting and hisses without articulate words. The crowd fell back a little, and many eyes were turned upon Henry Bayford, as though he were expected to play the part of leader to the excited mob.

Dautray looked round him calmly again, and said,—

“Where are my sons?”

“The cubs were here but a moment since. Where they be now I know not,” answered Bayford, who was striding towards Dautray with an ugly vindictive scowl upon his face. “Perchance they have met the fate

which all such scum deserve. Down with every foreign Papist in the land, say I. We want none such scum and offscouring of the earth in free England!"

A shout of approval greeted these words. The crowd made way for Bayford's approach, and closed round the two men as though expecting the pleasure of a fight.

Bayford did not look altogether at ease when set face to face with Dautray, who regarded him steadfastly, still holding his long and shining blade in his hand.

"If you have not laid hands upon the boys, they will be safe even here," said Dautray steadily: "it is you, and you alone, who are our bitter enemy. Why, it is for you to say, since we have never done you any harm. It is your doing that my home is in flames, and that I stand here in your 'free England,' as you call it, forsooth, a ruined and a persecuted man. You know well that I am no Papist—that my fathers have suffered bitter persecution for that very faith which you yourselves profess. It pleases you to brand me with the name, that you may fall upon my goods, and possess my lands. If that be England's freedom, give me the tyranny of France! I have no desire to live longer in a country where such things are possible to law-abiding persons. Restore to me my sons, and I will go forth from hence. I will leave the God of vengeance to deal with you, Henry Bayford. He is a God who judges the earth, and those who dwell thereon.

In His hands I leave my cause and my quarrel. He will deal with you after your deserts."

These words spoken in a clear loud tone fell upon the ears of the people standing round, and were not altogether without their effect. Perhaps the act of wanton destruction of which they had been guilty, and the sight of the burning buildings so recklessly destroyed, had aroused in them a certain sense of compunction. They had seen these buildings grow up one after the other through the thrift and skill of Dautray and his sons. It had taken years—not to say generations—to bring this little farmstead into its present prosperous condition, and now, in a single night all the fruit of this thrift and toil was to be swept away!

Small wonder then that some amongst those standing by began to feel shame at the deed they had been hounded on to perform. The red firelight, shining upon Dautray's thin, dark face, and lighting his glowing eyes, gave him a strange appearance, and inspired the onlookers with a feeling of momentary awe.

Bayford himself looked slightly disturbed as the words of quiet denunciation fell upon his ears. He was a superstitious man, and was well aware that he had acted a very ungenerous part, and that greed and covetous envy were his motives, not any love for the faith he professed to uphold. He recoiled a step from before his neighbour, and instead of attempting to reply to him, stood mute and shamefaced.

From another side of the burning building there came sounds of tumult and shouting.

“Down with them! Pitch them into the fire! Let them all burn together! A curse upon them! Papist spawn—let them follow their father the devil into the fire! Fling them in! Have they not served our Protestant brethren so! Bind them hand and foot and let them feed the flames! Have a care! they are like young wild cats! At them! after them! Let them not escape!”

These cries and yells were borne to Dautray's ears as he stood face to face with his enemy. In a moment his aspect changed. His sons were in peril. He recognized their voices shouting to each other, and he heard the savage cries of their persecutors. With a single bound he had cleared the ring that surrounded him, overturning more than one rustic in his hasty flight. Dashing round to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, he ran almost into the arms of Gaspard, who was running away, pursued by some dozen village ruffians. The lad's wrists were bound and bleeding, but he had plainly kicked himself free from his tormentors, and now cried out in stifled accents,—

“Free me, father! Free me! Oh, thank Heaven thou art here! They have Jules there bound hand and foot. Heaven alone knows what they will do to him if thou canst not rescue him. Methought I heard thy voice. I was coming to seek thee. Come this

way!—this way! We shall save him yet since I am now free!”

For Dautray had cut the thongs which bound his son's hands, and at the same moment Gaspard had caught up a club which lay on the ground, having been dropped by one of his pursuers.

“Is Claude safe?” asked Gaspard in a whisper, as they prepared for the rush.

“I trust so! I believe so!” answered Dautray; and then the pair braced themselves for a resolute and determined onslaught upon the yelling group wildly dancing around a certain spot where presumably Jules lay helpless in their midst.

Gaspard's eyes were flashing fire. Dautray set his teeth, and a hissing whisper passed between them.

“Forward, my son; we will save him, or die with him!” he cried, and the next moment father and son had dashed into the crowd, flinging the astonished rustics right and left, Gaspard dealing heavy blows with his club wherever he met resistance, and Dautray brandishing his blade in a fashion that cleared a pathway for him whichever way he turned.

It was as they had suspected. In the centre of that bending ring lay the prostrate figure of Jules, his face looking ghastly white in the glow of the fire, though his dark eyes were open and fixed with fearless indignation upon the faces of those about him.

With a yell of execration, Gaspard flung aside those who stood over his brother, and whilst Dautray kept

guard with his shining blade, the lad, with his pocket knife, loosed the cords which bound his brother, and Jules rose slowly to his feet, with the uncertain movement of a man who has been stunned and injured.

Dautray looked keenly and anxiously at him.

“Art thou hurt, my son?”

Jules put his hand to his head.

“I scarce know. My wits seem all astray. Methinks I was something rough handled. But it is nought—it is nought. Heed me not. Whither now, my father? for there be fifty to three. There is no safety for us here.”

Indeed it seemed not. The fury of the people was being aroused again by the actions of Dautray and his son, and by the oration of Bayford, who had instantly begun to harangue the people so soon as Dautray's back was turned.

“Away to the woods!” cried Gaspard. “It is our only chance.”

And indeed it seemed as if this were only too true. For the crowd, dispersed by the resolute attack of Gaspard and his father, had now joined that other group around Bayford, and were coming on with shouts and yells of fury, seeking for their victims, whom a sudden fall in the conflagration had for a moment hidden from their view.

Taking advantage of this brief period of darkness, Dautray seized his elder son by the arm, and drew him away towards a belt of woodland close at hand.

Gaspard following, and keeping a close outlook at the rear.

The crowd was swaying and surging wildly round the burning farm, and seeking its victims there. Bayford's voice could still be heard rising hoarsely above the din, denouncing all Papists and traitors, and calling upon his good neighbours to vindicate their loyalty by some act of savage fury.

But once within the shelter of the woodland, the Dautrays felt comparatively safe. Pursuit might be made, but it could hardly take a very determined form. There was no warrant out against them, and surely, they argued, their neighbours, amongst whom they had lived so long, could scarcely, save in moments of passion and excitement, seriously desire their lives.

From time to time the silence of the woods was broken by the shouts of some who were seeking to track the fugitives; but the pursuit was not systematic, and the Dautrays had no real trouble in hiding themselves away.

By circuitous paths they reached the hut where the reputed witch-woman lived, and as they approached with cautious steps, they heard themselves hailed in a well-known voice, and Claude came rushing out to fling himself upon his father's neck.

Old Margaret, too, came out, and received them kindly enough; but her face was full of warning.

"Linger not here in this distracted country," was her advice, as she set a plentiful meal before her

guests; "there is mischief abroad. Ill-conditioned men are everywhere going about denouncing innocent persons as spies and plotters against the king's life and the liberties of the country. It is like enough that thou wilt be suspected and branded as one of these if thou dost linger here, friend Dautray. The air is full of evil whispers, and the humble as well as the great fall victims daily to the breath of slander. Get thee hence, and that as soon as may be. England is no place for thee now. I speak to thee as a friend."

"I well believe thee, good friend," answered Dautray; "I have myself long felt the same. I have indeed made some provision for sudden flight, and God be thanked that it has been so, else were I a beggar to-day. But tell me more of what is passing in the world. I did guess that some news must have reached our village to-day. But I myself had heard nothing till the whole place was in arms against me and mine."

"It is said that a villainous popish plot has just been discovered, which aims at the death of the king, and I know not what besides. It is like to cost the lives or liberties of many hundreds of innocent persons. And thou, with thy foreign face, art in no small danger, the more so as Bayford has been accusing thee of secret Popery to the authorities of Southampton. It will be well for thee to lie hidden in my house this night, since the dawn will overtake thee ere long, if ye sally forth now; and at sundown on the morrow, when pursuit

will be over, get ye hence, get down to the harbour, and take some small vessel to France, to thine own friends there. After that thou canst make thine own plans for the future; but know this, that England is now no safe home for thee."

Dautray's face was very grave as he thanked old Margaret for her offer of hospitality, but the eyes of Gaspard and Claude were kindling with excitement—that excitement which is akin to joy.

"O father," they cried, almost in the same breath, "let us not live either in England or France; but let us fly to the great new world which lies away to the West. Let us to that New France of which thou hast told us, where, if there be perils and privations, yet men can be free, and live a glorious life of adventure and change. Ah, let us forth thither! We pant and yearn for freedom! Think of the horrid things we have seen and heard to-night! In those far lands men will not turn upon their white brethren like fiends! We can live safely and happily at peace with all men!"

Dautray's grave and anxious face softened into a smile as he heard these eager words. Old Margaret also smiled as she wisely shook her head, as though she could have told them that human nature was the same all the world over, and that New France would be no more free from jealousies and perils than the older continent they longed to quit. But she would not damp their youthful ardour; they would learn their

lessons all too soon as life went on, and all she said was,—

“Get to bed—get to bed, children, and rest while ye may. Sleep will fit ye best for whatever may betide. Get you to bed, and let me see to thy brother here, for he needs my care, if the rest of you have wonderfully escaped.”

And indeed the silent Jules looked more like a ghost than anything else, and proved to have received several wounds, and to have lost much blood. Margaret was better than any leech, for she had all the lore of the woods at her finger ends, and knew how to bind up wounds so that the smart was eased, and the flesh healed, in a wonderfully short time. She could make possets, too, that restored the failing powers and put new life into the blood; and under her kindly care, Jules soon lost his ghastly look and sank into refreshing slumber. But the father sat beside him looking anxious.

“Will he be fit to travel by sundown?” he asked.

Margaret looked at her patient, and pursed up her lips.

“It is no long journey, and the risk, methinks, is less than lingering longer here. He will be marvelously refreshed if he sleep as many hours as I hope he will. He is young and tough and strong. Yes, yes; I trow it will be better to leave then, even though he may be weary on the road. Once on board ship, the air of the sea will revive him, and he will have nought to do but to breathe it, and get a sound man once more.”

All the Dautrays slept late into the following day, Margaret taking good care that they should not be disturbed. She locked up the house, and set the mark upon the door which she always did when she was absent from home. Several persons visited the hut as the day drew on, for it was suspected by many that the fugitives might have taken refuge with her. But the closed door, and the fierce black cat which crouched upon the threshold like a sentinel, and of whom the whole neighbourhood stood mightily in awe, deterred them from prosecuting their inquiries further, and long before sundown these domiciliary visits had ceased.

“They would have liked to search the house, I doubt not,” the old woman said, with a grim smile, “but they fear the cat and my power too much. It is useful sometimes to be feared by those around, although it may end for me in the ducking-stool or the stake. Ah me! this world of ours is a strange place. My lore is nothing but what the book of nature teaches me, yet none will believe that. All declare it must be taught of the devil. God preserve us all from any knowledge that comes from him!”

Jules awoke much strengthened and refreshed, and professed himself quite restored. Gaspard and Claude were wild to be off to the sea, to commence that life of adventure upon which their hearts were set. They marvelled now how they had lived so contentedly upon the little farm all these years. They were almost prepared to rejoice in the tragedy of the previous night,

in so far as it had brought to them the prospect of a wider liberty than they had ever known before. Gaspard's dreams were of adventure and conquest; Claude's, of the magical wonders of the great strange lands of which he had heard and dreamed. The hearts of both boys beat high with anticipation and joy. This very night would see the commencement of a journey which might land them in these unknown and magical regions!

It seemed to their impatience as though the sun would never set, but at last the soft twilight stole into the wood, and since they had already partaken heartily of the supper prepared for them by their hospitable hostess, they were ready to depart the instant it seemed wise to do so.

Old Margaret kissed the boys she had loved from their birth, and gave them each a wallet of food, and a few small phials of valuable compounds of her own preparing, the nature of which she had carefully explained to Jules already. Dautray pressed her hands, and spoke broken words of thanks. She promised, with tears in her eyes, that the lonely grave of the mother should not be forgotten, and then she stood in her doorway and waved her hand, and watched the little procession wind away down the hill, till the trees shut it out from view.

Jules leaned upon his father's arm, but walked firmly and manfully. Claude and Gaspard were as usual a little ahead, but not much, for it was wise that the

party, should keep together, and move quietly and cautiously. It was scarcely probable that watch would be kept for them so near home now. People would certainly think that they had made for the heart of the forest, or for the sea during the first night. Still, carefulness was desirable all along, and especially so when they should near the harbour of Southampton, where it was not improbable that some sort of look-out for them might be made.

“Heaven speed them on their way, and bring them safe to their native land!” breathed old Margaret, as the darkness hid them from her view. “These be evil times in this and other lands; but, perchance, across those wastes of waters a new earth may be rising up purer and better than this one here. God in His mercy watch over them, and let them escape the snares which may be spread for them. For I fear that they may have perils yet to overcome. Yon Bayford is a malignant man, and will stick at little to curry favour with those in authority. It was for no good that he went into Southampton yesterday, I will be bound! That same evening he caused the house of his neighbour to be burned to the ground. Doubtless he will feel far safer and happier if he can cause the neck of that outraged neighbour to fall beneath the sword of the executioner, or cause him to perish at the hangman’s hands. But if good Dautray will but follow the counsel I have given him, methinks he may yet escape the malice of his foe.”

CHAPTER III.

FROM PERIL TO PERIL.

“**N**OW, my sons, this is the place of which old Margaret spoke. I see the lights in the cabin twinkling below. Stay you here, and I will go forward alone, and seek to make my bargain with the trader of whom she spake to us. I misdoubt me whether we shall find him easy to deal with, but at least he is bound for La Rochelle, and he will sail before dawn of day and avoid all contact with other vessels. He is the man for us, if he will take us, and Margaret said that he was one who would sell his soul for gold.”

“And methinks also that he fears her powers if he refuses any request of hers,” added Gaspard; “so if you show him both the gold and the token, why he will scarce dare to say nay.”

“Like enough, like enough,” answered the father; “but be that as it may, rest you here, the three of you, and I will go down alone. There in the darkness below lies the creek where he is wont to load and unload his craft. It is there that I shall find him, and when I have made my bargain, I will come and fetch you.”

Jules had already thrown himself down upon the mossy bank with the air of one exhausted by fatigue. Claude, who was also tired with the tramp through the dark wood, sat down beside him; but Gaspard paced about hither and thither like a restless woodland creature. He was aching to be free from this land of inhospitable soil, and away on the great ocean, whither he had ever longed to be.

It was already midnight, and the darkness in the wood was deep, albeit a glimmering starlight—for there was no moon—showed to them the gleaming waters of the great estuary lying beneath them. They had struck Southampton Water (as we now call it) at a point considerably above the harbour and the city. Small vessels came up into the wood-locked waters to discharge their cargo, and the men who guided them up the intricacies of the channel were often men of no very good repute, carrying on a trade of a more or less contraband description. But it was to such craft as these that refugees appealed for aid in leaving the shores which were no longer safe for them. And old Margaret knew of a boat about to sail with the high tide at three in the morning, to the captain of which she had given an injunction to befriend Dautray and his sons.

It seemed long to the impatient boys before their father returned to them, but at last they heard his steps approaching, and Gaspard and Claude eagerly ran to meet him.

“What news, father?”

“Why, good, so far as it goes. The man will take us. But he and his crew are as villainous a lot to look upon as I have ever beheld. Were it not that our need is great, I would fain have found some other way of travelling. But it brooks not to delay. If it be that Bayford has already warned those at Southampton that we are a family of dangerous Papists, why, there is no time to be lost. This fellow weighs anchor at three in the morning, and before the day has fairly dawned we shall be away beyond the prying eyes of the craft in the river’s mouth.”

Gaspard flung his cap into the air with a gesture of triumph.

“So as we be once on the seas, I care nothing for the ill looks of those we sail with,” he cried. “Are there not four of us? And have we not all weapons which we know how to use? What matter if they do look black at us? They will not dare molest us.”

Gaspard had no fears; indeed, he rather enjoyed the idea of an adventure upon the seas. He was in a fever of excitement till they descended the wooded slope to the water’s edge, and heard the rough but subdued voices of the sailors as they stowed away the cargo and got the vessel ready for sailing.

There was too little light to see anything but the outline of the craft as she lay upon the water. She was of a good size, and carried two masts. It was not often that vessels so large came up so high into these waters, but there had been high tides lately, and this

man plainly knew what he was about, and as old Margaret had said, had navigated the river since his boyhood.

Backwards and forwards plied the little dinghy taking out the last of the cargo to the vessel. The boys looked on eagerly, and offered to help, but were roughly bidden to stand aside. The men spoke so strange and rough a dialect to one another that the Dautrays could scarcely understand a word they said. They seemed to be a mixed crew of various nationalities. But they were well under obedience to their captain—that was quite evident.

At length all the cargo had been stored, and the captain made a surly gesture of invitation to his passengers. Dautray and his sons were conveyed across the glimmering water to the side of the craft, and almost as soon as they were on board the word was given, the anchor was hauled up, and the vessel began to slip silently down the channel between the wood-crowned heights on either side.

Gaspard drew a deep breath of exultation when once he felt the movement of the ship. His eyes glowed with triumph. He was afloat. They were off and away! The life of adventure had begun! No longer would they be tied to the monotonous toil of a small farm. They had the whole world before them now, and were about to seek their fortunes in those strange and wondrous lands towards which the hearts of hundreds and thousands in Europe were now beginning to turn with such great longing and desire.

The captain stood at the helm, for the steering of the large boat down the narrow channel was a matter of some difficulty, and needed great knowledge and skill; but the mate came up to Dautray and said that he had better come below to the cabin until they were clear of the harbour.

He led them to a small and dirty little cabin in the fore-part of the ship, and gruffly told them that that was all the accommodation the vessel had to offer. Dautray replied that they would make it sufficient, and looked about him by the meagre light afforded by the small and ill-smelling lamp which burned there.

The place was narrow and contracted. It was only possible to stand upright in the middle. The bunks were like shelves, and only a dirty blanket was provided for each. There was an ill smell in the cabin which made Claude pull a wry face. But Gaspard, who saw everything through rose-coloured glasses, set to work with a will to wash and scour out the dirty hole, and with such good results that by the time an hour had passed it looked a very different sort of place, and might do well enough for them for the few days they would need to occupy it.

Dautray meantime was anxiously tending his eldest son, who appeared to him to be in anything like a fit condition to endure the possible hardships which awaited them. The night walk through the forest had so completely exhausted his strength that he lay in his narrow bed in a semi-conscious condition, and there was a look

of fever in his eyes which his father dreaded to see. He began to fear that Jules had been more hurt upon the night of the fire than anybody knew. The silent one never uttered complaint or spoke of himself. Even now he would confess to nothing but a little fatigue.

“Let him sleep,” said Gaspard the sanguine, coming and standing by. “He will wake up strong and well again. The air of the salt sea will give him life. I can feel it already myself, even down in this ill-smelling hole. I must upon deck once more to see where we are. Is it not good to feel the swaying of the boat, and to hear the rush of the water beneath our slit of a window? O father, methinks I was born to be a sailor! It gives me new life to feel the bird-like motion of the vessel through the waves.”

The dawn was beginning to glimmer in the east as Gaspard set foot upon deck. Away to the left he saw the clustering houses of the city of Southampton, and before him the widening expanse of water. The breeze was favourable, and the boat a fast sailer. She was slipping along through the water at a goodly rate of speed, and the captain was keeping a close lookout as he stood at the helm and directed her course, bawling out his orders from time to time to the crew—orders which were perfectly unintelligible to Gaspard, but which were obeyed with a promptitude that aroused his keen admiration.

Fain would he have made friends with the sailors, and have learned from them the meaning of the strange

things about him, and the mysteries of their craft; but they were a sullen and ill-conditioned lot, and met his advances with rough words and oaths, so that the lad was forced to turn from them and stand apart, somewhere where he could not be in the way, and could watch the opal-tinted dawn stealing upon the sleeping world, and feel the salt kisses of the tidal water upon his wet cheek.

He was not ordered below, but the men glowered at him when they passed him by, and returned no answer to his smile or attempts to lend a hand with rope or spar. The voice of his father calling to him presently drew him away from his coign of vantage, and brought him down to the cabin, where a frugal meal was laid out.

The fare was coarse, but the sea air had given an appetite to three out of the four, and none of them were dainty in their habits.

Jules alone could taste nothing, but lay in his unclean bed with closed eyes and parted lips, his face very white, save where the intermittent flush of fever streaked the white with crimson.

“What ails him, father?” asked Gaspard.

Dautray shook his head gravely.

“I fear it is fever from his wounds. Margaret said she feared it might come on. I have given him a dose of her medicine, and it has quieted him somewhat. But he is weak as an infant, and he can take no food. That is not the way to gain strength and manhood.”

“The sea will give him strength,” again said Gaspard the sanguine; “it is like new wine in the blood. Soon we shall leave these quiet waters behind and feel the swell and the heaving of the great waves. Oh, it is a grand thing to be on the sea at last! I have longed for it all my life!”

After the brothers had cleared away the remains of the meal, Gaspard took Claude upon deck to see the wonders of the receding shore, and the Island to which they had once in their lives crossed over. The sun shone on the dancing waters. The wind sang a ceaseless tune in the rigging overhead, and the salt spray dashed in their faces as they stood feeling the gradual change of motion, as the quiet waters of the great harbour were left behind and the chopping waves of the Channel were reached.

Claude was not certain that he quite liked the motion. It affected his head somewhat, although he was spared the miseries of sea-sickness. But to Gaspard it was nothing but exhilaration and joy. He could have sung aloud as he paced the deck in the pure joy of his heart, but the consciousness that the sailors regarded him with unfriendly glances kept him from any open exhibition of joy. He sat beside Claude, who curled himself up in the bow on a coil of rope, and let the salt air fan his cheeks, and together the brothers spoke of all the wonders which lay before them, and of the great things that they were about to do.

But in the cabin things were by no means well. Jules was prostrated by a low fever, which was aggravated by the closeness of the atmosphere and by the character of the greasy food which was all his father could procure for him, and even for the unsavoury broth he had to pay a heavy price. The sick lad could take but little of it, and lay with his face to the wall in silent suffering and weakness. Dautray himself was prostrated at intervals by spasms of sea-sickness, which left him feeling weak and shaken. Between times he felt pretty much himself, but was conscious that his strength was becoming impaired through the bad food and this constantly-recurring nausea. Gaspard was the only one of the party who was quite in his wonted strength and spirits, and the father was becoming more and more convinced of the unfriendly attitude of the captain and crew of the vessel.

Why this should be so he did not know, but it was evident that there was growing up a hostility of feeling which was anything but reassuring. Dautray suspected that the captain believed him possessed of wealth, and had an eye upon it. He had already paid him a rather exorbitant sum for the passage-money of himself and his sons to La Rochelle. He had tried to strike a different bargain; to pay half at starting and retain the other half till the voyage ended, but the man refused to hear of anything but money down at the start.

This had been paid, but it seemed as though every mouthful of food were grudged them, and for every

small extra asked for on behalf of the sick Jules an extortionate price was demanded.

It became clear to Dautray at last that his ability to pay such large sums for such small privileges was exciting the cupidity of the captain and crew. Often he saw them talking together aside, and casting keen glances in the direction of the cabin. More than once he had caught sight of a prying eye at the keyhole of the cabin door, or fixed at some crevice giving a sight of the interior of the cabin. It was plain to him that he was being watched to see where he kept his money ; and he resolved more and more resolutely that the secret of the belt beneath his clothing should not be discovered. He had a purse which contained his loose cash for present emergency, and he never permitted the belt to be made visible, or took coins from his store there save in the pitchy darkness of the cabin at night.

But he took no such special care over the purse which he carried about him. He let that be seen from time to time, and once, when he knew himself to be spied upon, he placed it with great care in a crevice in the woodwork of the cabin, as though to show to the spy on the watch that that was the place where it was kept.

All this while they were beating down the Channel westward, sometimes just sighting the coast of Brittany, sometimes seeing nothing round them but sea and sky.

The weather was in the main favourable. There was enough breeze to keep the ship moving. It was not always as much in their favour as could be wished, but

the captain understood his business, and never failed to make a certain way day by day.

But after they had rounded the Breton headland and passed the harbour of Brest, finding themselves in the dreaded Bay of Biscay, a sudden and most undesirable change took place in the weather. The sky suddenly became overcast, the bright sunshine took a watery and uncertain gleam. Banks of ominous clouds piled themselves up in the west, and the wind took a moaning sound which struck strangely upon the ears of the landsmen.

Gaspard who, in spite of all discouragements and rebuffs, had succeeded in winning a certain grudging right to assist the crew at their tasks, was aware, by the rapid way in which they set to work to shorten canvas, and by the grim looks upon their faces, that something untoward was happening; and it did not take a sailor's weather-eye to see that a storm was brewing, which might burst upon them in pitiless fury before long.

Summer though it was, there was no reckoning on weather, once in the treacherous and cruel bay. Gaspard had heard of the tempests in the Bay of Biscay before this. Now he was to see one for himself.

Suddenly the great green waves rose mountains high, and seemed to fall upon the vessel with a great crash. She rose above their crest, but only to plunge down into the seething trough between, and all her planks shuddered under the strain, as though they would part asunder. It seemed to Gaspard for the first half-hour

as though they would go to the bottom every instant. He shut his eyes and sought to pray ; but the excitement of the sense of peril quickly snatched away his thoughts again, and the matter-of-fact way in which the sailors went about their work gave him a feeling of security.

It was a strange and rather terrible experience, and in the little cabin below, Dautray gathered his sons about him, and prayed long and earnestly for help and salvation from these angry waters. Whither they were going they knew not. The little vessel was driven hither and thither at the mercy of the wind. The captain did all he could to keep upon his course, but he was baffled by the shifting of the wind and by the violence of the waves. For three days and nights the tempest lasted, and each day Gaspard noted blacker looks upon the faces of the crew, and heard angry mutterings if he went amongst them or spoke to them.

“These accursed Papists ! it is their doing !” he once heard the captain say, and the men looked at him with aversion and fear in their eyes, till it came upon him with a sense of sudden conviction that the captain, for reasons of his own, was rousing in the minds of his crew the superstitious notion that the storm was the work of his passengers, or else sent from Heaven for their chastisement ; and when he told his father what he had heard, Dautray’s face grew pale, for he had lived long enough to know well to what lengths fanatical

hatred can carry men when their fears and cupidity are aroused.

Doubtless the captain was inciting in his men this hatred and fear of their passengers. What form their hatred would take was an open question as yet unknown to Gaspard, but certainly it boded no good to the hapless refugees.

“Could they defend themselves in case of attack?” he asked himself, looking about him keenly. Jules still lay weak as an infant on his bed. The fever was abating, but the lack of nourishment suitable to his condition was hindering anything like a good recovery. Claude was but a boy, and though he knew how to use his weapons on shore, he still suffered too much from vertigo on board ship to be relied upon. Anxiety and sea-sickness had robbed Dautray himself of his wonted strength, and only Gaspard, of the whole party, was in condition to show fight successfully. And what could he do against all those strong, rough men, if they were to band together for attack? The father groaned in spirit, and wondered if he would not have done better to face the perils of the shore. They had but passed from peril to peril, and here, hemmed in by the narrow planks of the ship, helpless in the midst of the ocean, their plight was sorry indeed.

All night the father had turned and tossed, thinking of these things. With the first light of dawn he was aware of the figure of the captain standing in the doorway of the cabin (how long he had been standing

there Dautray did not know), regarding the whole party with looks of menace.

“Rise, all of you, and come with me,” spoke the man in stern accents.

The voice awoke Gaspard and Claude, who had been sleeping uneasily in the tossing ship. The storm still continued. It was less violent, but it seemed as though its persistence would never cease.

The Dautrays sprang to their feet—they never undressed in this place—and were ready on the instant. The captain had his hand hidden in his doublet, as though he grasped a hidden weapon.

“Come with me; come all of you!” he said, in the same rough and commanding voice, and his eyes rested upon the prostrate form of Jules, who still lay motionless in the narrow bed from which he had never risen yet.

“He is sick. He cannot come,” answered the father; but the captain made significant reply.

“He must come. Bring him yourselves, or I send my men for him. The fresh air will do him good. This vessel has not suited him. It may well be he will do better in another.”

All looked at the speaker in amaze. What could he mean? But it was plain he meant to be obeyed, and Dautray and Gaspard raised Jules tenderly enough, and supported him up to the deck.

The grey light of a stormy morning was breaking over the heaving sea. The clouds still looked angry

and lowering, but not more so than the faces of the sailors, who had gathered together at the vessel's side, and were looking down at something below on the water.

When the Dautrays appeared all broke into low groans, and in their peculiar dialect they cursed them with a vindictive menace that made Claude shrink and tremble, and caused the father's heart to contract with apprehension.

"Is the boat ready?" bawled the captain.

"Ready!" sang out the mate, with an evil grin upon his face; "but you'd best make haste lest she should be swamped before we get them aboard!"

The captain turned to his passengers, and said brutally,—

"Here, you accursed Papists, who have brought all this trouble upon us. It is your doing that the heavens have sent us such a storm as we have never known in these seas in this summer season; and so long as you are aboard we shall neither make port nor be safe of our lives. The devil, your master, will doubtless take you safe ashore, if you only invoke him loud enough; but for that we neither care nor trouble ourselves. We are not going to lose our lives for the sake of an accursed crew of Papists. Take yourselves and your familiar spirits away with you in yon boat. Whether you sink or swim is no matter to us. We have victualled the boat with bread and water for a week. If you can keep afloat for that time you may see land. If not—the

fates do with you as you deserve—we will have no more of you. But you shall pay us for all the ill and loss that you have brought upon us. So out with every penny of money you possess. If you do not give it up, it shall be taken by force from you!”

Resistance was useless. A search by force might only lead to the discovery of the belt whose existence was not as yet discovered.

Dautray handed over the purse, and the captain eagerly looked at the contents, grumbling that there was no more. Then Jules was roughly seized and hustled over the side of the vessel into the tossing boat, much as though he were a sack of flour. Gaspard sprang in of his own accord, his eyes flashing, his heart in a glow of fury. Yet he experienced a sort of vague triumph and joy as he felt the rocking of the little craft beneath his feet. Here at least they would be saved from contact with evil men and from the malice of the enemy. The sight of the great rolling waves which tossed them to and fro like a shuttlecock was sufficiently appalling, but for the moment anything seemed better than the sight of those evil faces and vindictive gestures.

Claude and Dautray quickly followed, and the father and sons stood together in that frail little craft, which looked as though it could scarce live for ten minutes in that angry sea.

Dautray lifted his hand above his head and shook it towards the ship, whose side was lined with its barbarous crew.

“May the God of earth and sea deal by you as you have dealt by us!” he said, as the two crafts drifted apart.

An angry laugh was the response, and yet fear was painted on many faces. Superstition was rife in those days, and just as Dautray spoke, a gleam of level sunlight broke through the sullen clouds and streamed upon the boat and its load, lighting up Claude’s golden hair, and giving something weird and unearthly to the aspect of the little group on board.

“Heaven send it be not a curse!” whispered the men one to another, and there were some few amongst them who would almost have recalled their murderous action; but already the wind was drifting the two vessels far apart, and in the trough of the heaving waves the little frail craft was speedily swallowed up from sight, so that the sailors asked one another, with something of a shudder, if indeed she had sunk already.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WIDE SEA.

THE sun shone pitilessly down upon a sea of molten glass.

Upon the long, gently-heaving billows rose and fell, like a cork upon its wide bosom, a little boat—a boat guided neither by oars nor sails—a cockle-shell idly rocking upon the shining waters, the sport of every breeze that blew.

Was there—could there be any living thing in that tiny, helpless craft? At first it had the appearance of being empty—drifting away as it were in helpless impotence.

But stay, did not something move, and raise itself? Is not that a human creature gazing out over the pitiless waste of waters? Who and what is it—that phantom craft, gliding in silence over the shining waves?

In very truth it is a boat, and there are human beings in it. Of these human beings three lie like dead along the bottom, or curled up in an attitude of abandoned despair in the bow. Sad wrecks of humanity,

with baked lips, starting bones, and faces expressive of the hopeless despair of the castaway, perishing slowly of hunger and thirst. Only one of the party has enough life in him to raise his head from time to time and cast a weary look around the broad horizon, eagerly scanning the unbroken line of sky and sea for the sight of a sail, or for the raising of a cloud which might bring a refreshing shower in its wake. But after a long look around, the head sinks down once more, and the dull lethargy of complete exhaustion swallows up the victim again.

It is indeed Gaspard, who alone of all that hapless party still retains consciousness and vitality enough to maintain an almost hopeless lookout from time to time.

Of those terrible days of tossing at the mercy of wind and wave he scarcely retains any memory. Already his mind is astray. The fever fancies come over him again and again. He knows not where he is, nor what those silent companions of his are. He thinks he has always been sailing upon a sea of glass, and that there is no such thing left in the world as dry land. All has been swept away, and he alone out of the whole world has been left alive.

He has ceased to wonder whether there is any life in those helpless figures at his feet. He has ceased to seek to allay his aching thirst by tumbling overboard into the green water and letting the sea enfold him, thus taking in moisture at the pores, which was denied him in other form. He has spread the sailcloth over

those about him, to protect them from the glare of the summer sun, but now he scarce knows that they are there. Habit still causes him to look round about him from time to time, but there is less and less speculation in the glazing eyes each time the head is raised.

Ha! what is that, rising like the pinion of a white sea-bird out of the glassy sea? Gaspard raises himself and shades the light from his eyes, making a strenuous endeavour to collect his weak and scattered faculties, and to bethink him where he is and what all this means.

Yes, it is coming nearer! It is no longer vaguely indeterminate in form. It is a sail!—a sail!—a sail! The boy says the word over and over with his lips before the sense of it penetrates to his brain. Then all in a moment he remembers. He knows that it is life or death to him whether or not this sail comes nearer—whether or not that little vessel sees them, or passes unheeding on her way. With the sudden strength of desperation he raises aloft the signal already prepared by them—it seems now as though in some former stage of existence—and he waves it wildly to and fro.

Is the signal seen? Is it heeded?

His eyes are so dim he can hardly see. His heart is thumping against his ribs in a way that turns him faint and giddy. With frantic desperation he continues to wave his flag. What is that sound that now falls upon his ears?

Surely it is the beat of oars coming nearer, nearer—

ever nearer! The flag drops from his nerveless hand. He strains his eyes through the blinding mists that enwrap him. Is that a boat stealing up towards them? He hears the splash of the oars. He hears the hail of a friendly voice, and then he hears and sees nothing more, for the darkness comes down like a thick curtain and shuts him away from all about him. He knows nothing more.....

Once more the eyes of Gaspard Dautray open upon a vision of smooth shining sea and cloudless sky: but all the intolerable suffering and aching weariness are gone. His lips are cool and moist. His limbs feel light and strong. There is a little confusion of the mind, for he cannot remember where he is, nor what it is that has befallen him; but he is content, with a great and wonderful contentment. He is lying upon a heap of canvas covered with a sheepskin, and he feels the heaving of the deck beneath him. He is on board ship. He is being carried by the light breeze fast over the shining sea. He is no longer a castaway. He is safe somewhere—though how and where he knows not. But for the moment he does not even seek to know. He closes his eyes and sinks back into refreshing slumber.

When next Gaspard awoke it was to feel a hand upon his, and he opened his eyes to find a grave, benignant face looking earnestly into his.

This face belonged to a man wearing the long brown

habit which suggested the idea of a monkish recluse: but the face hardly seemed that of a monk, for it was bearded, and the beard was snow-white, as was also the hair which fell to the shoulders in soft waves. The noble head being slightly bald, it was impossible to say whether the tonsure was there or not. The eyes were strangely luminous in expression, and full of earnestness and benignity.

In his hands this good man held a steaming cup, and when he saw that Gaspard was awake, and that his eyes were clear and full of comprehension, he said in French—spoken with just sufficient accent to show that it was not his native tongue,—

“You are better, my son? God be thanked for that. Take this and drink it, and then we will talk awhile together.”

Gaspard did as he was bid, and thought he had never tasted anything so delicious before. It seemed to bring him back to life and the world again, and returning the cup into the hand of his benefactor, he looked up wistfully into his face and said,—

“Tell me of them. It is all like a dark, horrible dream. Tell me, are they—are they—?” He could not frame the words which trembled on his tongue; his cheek grew white with apprehension.

“Be not afraid, my son. The Lord has been very merciful. They have indeed been down to the very jaws of death, but He has given them back. We feared much for the elder and the younger lad. There was

but little life left in either of them when they were brought on board. But patience and skill, by the blessing of God, have restored them to life. Thy brothers will be longer in recovering strength than thou hast been; but thy father is doing well. He will be able to talk with thee upon the morrow. You have indeed been mercifully and wonderfully preserved. Remember that, my child, and seek in the life so strangely and wonderfully given back to thee, to magnify and serve the Lord who has so preserved thee."

Then the white-haired man moved away, and Gaspard sought not to detain him. His heart was overflowing with thankfulness, and the unbidden tears had rushed to his eyes. Sleep again swallowed him up in her healing clasp, and when he awoke again it was night, and the moon was shining down solemnly upon the placid sea, making a great white pathway through which they seemed about to sail.

Gaspard felt so much refreshed that he no longer desired to lie still on his comfortable bed. He rose to his feet and looked about him. At the helm there was a sturdy-looking sailor, and right up in the extreme bow of the little vessel stood a motionless figure—the moonlight shining full upon the flowing white hair—and Gaspard knew that it was his friend of a few hours back, and felt certain that he was absorbed in meditation or prayer.

Although longing to know more of him, he would

not disturb him now, but made his way towards the sailor, who gave him a friendly nod, and wished him good even. This man was English, and beamed with pleasure when the lad addressed him in his own tongue. His lips were immediately unlocked, and he told his eager listener a strange tale.

Several days ago they had been attracted by the glow of fire upon the water just as the sun sank. Plainly there was some ship burning, and probably in need of help. It lay out of their course to go to her assistance, but the word had been given, and they turned instantly about and sailed as fast as the light breeze would take them to her aid. Before they reached her, however, she had been burned to the very water's edge, and it seemed as though help had come too late. There was no living thing to be seen upon the waters when the vessel sank, but cruising about for a short time they did pick up a poor wretch, much burnt and maimed, who had lashed himself to a spar, and was thus kept afloat for a time. He lived only a few hours, but in that time he made a confession. He told how he and his mates, instigated by the captain of the vessel, had some ten days before turned adrift in their boat—the boat which might have saved them at the fire, if they had but had it then—a party of passengers whom they had agreed to carry to La Rochelle. Wanton cruelty, superstition, and greed had been the motives for this outrage, but it seemed as though it had brought a curse with it. The wind had gone down, it is true, but they found themselves at fault

in their reckonings. Sudden illness had broken out amongst the crew, and three men had sickened and died of fever in as many days. The rest, in fear of infection, had got at the spirits, and tried to drown fear and danger in intoxication. A drunken quarrel had resulted, in which the captain had been stabbed to the heart by the mate. Then they had all quarrelled together, and at last the ship was found to be on fire. There was no longer a boat in which to save themselves, and every soul had perished, save this man, who did not survive the telling of the tale more than a few hours.

Gaspard listened to the recital with bated breath and eager eyes.

“It must have been the men that turned us adrift. Oh, what a terrible end for them!”

“Yes, so said Father Fritz; and he bid us put about and search these waters might and main for the drifting boat. We have been hunting you for these many days, young master, and had well nigh given up hope of finding you, till we sighted that signal of yours yesterday, and so came upon you.”

“And you were looking for us all the while? Ah, how good God has been to us! We thought that nothing but a terrible death lay before us. Tell me, who is Father Fritz? Is this vessel his? It is he who stands yonder, is it not?”

“Ay, truly. He stands thus every night, if no other duty claims him. We think that he holds very close communion with the God of heaven. He is a wonderful

man, though who he is, and whence he comes, are not truly known to us. Men say that Germany is the land of his birth, but he has roamed over half the world, and speaks many tongues. He has amazing depths of knowledge, into which men may probe without touching the bottom. All who know him love him, and those who serve him would lay down their lives for him gladly."

The sailor spoke with feeling, and brushed his sleeve across his eyes. Gaspard looked across at the figure in the bows, and said—

"Is he a monk?"

"Nay, I trow not, for he seems to belong to no order, albeit he wears a habit not unlike that of the monks. I have heard it said that Roman Catholics call him a heretic, whilst the Protestants declare him to be a Papist. I am no scholar. All I know is that he is a holy man, and that God is in all his thoughts. I was bred up to know the Scriptures, and I thought I did till I heard Father Fritz open them up sometimes to us, as we sit about him and hear him talk. I sometimes think that the Lord Himself has been his teacher, else he could never have come to see what he does in the written Word. Neither is it written words to him alone, but a living Word—and he lives it in his life if ever man did."

"And whither are you bound now?" asked Gaspard, after he had listened with eager interest to many stories concerning Father Fritz, as he appeared to be called by all who knew him.

“To the Far West,” answered the sailor. “We set sail with one the *Sieur de la Salle*, who goes forth from France with a commission from the king, and who has high hopes of making some wondrous discoveries which shall bring untold wealth into the coffers of his monarch, and cover his own name with glory.”

Gaspard’s eyes flashed. This was indeed good hearing. He was embarked, then, upon just such a voyage of discovery as his soul had yearned for so long!

“And Father Fritz goes with him?”

“With him, yet not with him,” answered the sailor. “He goes at his own charges. He can remain with the *Sieur de la Salle*, or go his own way, as it seems best to him. His mission is to the souls of the Indians who dwell in the trackless lands to be discovered. They are dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death, and when each expedition sets forth, holy friars and men of God attend, to care for the souls of these lost people, to teach and baptize them, and bring them into the fold of Christ. Father Fritz yearns over them. As I have said, he is a strange and wonderful man, and none rightly know to what portion of the Church he belongs. He himself says that the Lord has but one Church—one Body—and that he knows of none but that one into which all are admitted who are baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Roman Catholics like not such teaching, for that places heretics on equal terms with them as members of the Church. The Protestants like it not, for it does not exclude the Papists from

communion with them, as they desire. And yet all men who come across him love good and holy Father Fritz, and I think that, growing weary of the strife of tongues in the lands of Europe, where he has striven to give his message, he is glad to turn his back and find a wider field in the untrodden realms of the west, where, if a man be a Christian, it will be enough. He will scarce care to ask whether he be Protestant or Papist."

Long and eagerly did Gaspard talk with this sailor, who was, as he soon discovered, a very different man from the bulk of his class, having both thought and read for himself, and having picked up much information during a long life of travel and adventure.

He told the lad of the settlements at Quebec and Montreal already made. He had twice visited the rising city of Quebec, and had seen something of the life there. He told of the troubles with the Indian tribes, their treacherous nature, their savage cruelty in war, their friendship at one time and their hostile raids at another, and the difficulties of the Governor with them, and with his own community there. He told of the jealousies and quarrels between Governor and Intendant, between Jesuits and Sulpicians; and how the colonists, instead of tilling the land and making it bring forth increase, thought only of amassing speedy riches through the fur-trade, and were getting into constant difficulties which brought them to the verge of starvation. It certainly did not seem as though the French settlement in Canada had proved very successful as yet;

but it was of the wild dreams of new territories to be discovered, new countries to be opened up, that Gaspard burned to know more, and his new friend was willing to answer all the questions put to him, so far as his knowledge went.

The *Sieur de la Salle*, he said, had discovered certain rivers which rose not far from the great chain of lakes beyond Quebec and Montreal. These rivers, he believed, converged in some mighty stream of water which flowed right through the vast continent, and emptied itself, perhaps, into the Gulf of Mexico, perhaps into the great western ocean beyond. Along this great and mighty river lay vast tracts of undiscovered country, populated doubtless by wild Indian tribes. The bold plan of *La Salle* was to discover and subjugate this territory for the King of France; to make this mighty river a highway for all sorts of rich merchandise; to divert to it the fur-trade of the north, much of which now found its way to other markets, and all the trade in spices, feathers, and even precious stones, which might spring up amongst the tribes along its mighty course; and thus, by the construction of forts at the mouth—when the mouth should be discovered—bring the whole of this colossal district under the direct control of the French monarch and nation, and find means whereby a constant stream of wealth might be poured into the coffers of France, unhindered by winter frosts, or by the attacks of jealous enemies, which troubles were constant and increasing in the northerly regions.

Gaspard's eyes dilated with wonder as he listened to all this. His ears eagerly drank in every word. His notions of geography were as hazy as was usual in those days, but his imagination was boundless and fervid. Already he saw himself sharing in these mighty discoveries, treading where foot of man had never trodden before, seeing all manner of strange and wonderful sights, and following down to its mouth that mighty river of whose very existence he had been ignorant till now.

“Has the *Sieur de la Salle* found all the men he wants?” he asked breathlessly; “will he refuse to let us accompany him—I and my father and my brothers? We have no home. We have been driven away from home and country. Methinks there is nought for us but to find a home in a strange land? Why not be of those to found this great new kingdom?—and hold it for the King of France when it be found, as surely it will?”

The sailor smiled at the lad's enthusiasm, but was of opinion that *La Salle* would be glad enough of stout-hearted volunteers upon his expedition. He had brought with him a good many eager French subjects; but many persons, who started boldly upon such an errand, turned fearful and timid when they began to understand the many and great dangers by which they were surrounded. Colin himself—for so the man said he was called—had made a voyage along the chain of lakes with *Father Fritz*, upon his first visit to the New

World, and he could speak with experience of the many and great dangers which awaited travellers, even when the natives were friendly. It was likely enough that many who started would turn back before much of the ground had been covered. It was generally the way, and jealousies had a fashion of springing up and dividing the party. The *Sieur de la Salle* was a better manager of the Indians, said *Colin*, than he was of his own countrymen. He was too silent and suspicious to get on with these, but the Indians liked his commanding ways, and gave him reverence and affection.

All this was immensely interesting to *Gaspard*, and indeed to the whole party of the *Dautrays*, as the days passed by, and they slowly recovered from their fight with death.

The skill and tender nursing of *Father Fritz* served to restore the whole party to strength and health. Those days upon that tossing boat, through which they seemed to have lived as by an actual miracle, soon began to look like a dream of the night. But *Father Fritz* spoke earnestly to all about the goodness and mercy of God in so sparing them. He said that many lives, when almost miraculously preserved, had been consecrated to God by the gratitude of those saved, and brought home to the hearts of all the boys the feeling that they were not the arbiters of their own fate, but must look in all things to God for guidance and direction.

But there was nothing in his talk of a kind that

would urge a monastic life upon any. He shook his head when Dautray spoke of it, and said that he had not been able to see that the Lord asked this of His children. To live above the world, was not to take themselves out of the world, and the habit of the monk did not keep off the temptations of the evil one, nor the lusts of the flesh.

As Colin had hinted, it was not entirely easy to know what manner of man Father Fritz was. One thing, however, was abundantly plain, that his whole life was dedicated to the service of his Master, and that he was going forth into these wild regions, not to seek to establish an earthly kingdom for any human sovereign, still less to accumulate wealth for himself or others, but to bring the news of salvation to the dark places of the earth, and seek to illumine with the light of the gospel those heathen lands stained with the superstitions and barbarities of centuries.

“Might they go with him? might they help him?” the eager boys asked; Gaspard and Claude being full of the enthusiasm which is so often inspired by a pure and noble zeal.

His answer was given with a certain grave tenderness which was very wonderful to them.

“He would most gladly take them if their father approved, but he knew not whither his way might take him, nor what dangers he might not encounter. They might perchance prefer the glory and the adventures to be had with the *Sieur de la Salle*. They had better

decide nothing till they had reached Quebec, and knew what that great leader had set himself to accomplish."

Dautray was deeply impressed by the conversation of Father Fritz and by what he heard of his life and work. He was willing to let his sons follow their own bent. Life for them had been torn up by the roots, as it were. He scarce knew himself what he wished to do in the future. The thirst after adventures in new lands had taken a certain hold on him, as it had upon his sons. He was ready to permit them to follow their wishes, and with Father Fritz he felt sure that they would come to no spiritual hurt. That they would all go with their lives in their hands, when trusting themselves into the wilds of a savage country infested by hordes of Indians, was, of course, well known to all. Father Fritz was the last person to deny the perils of the undertaking to which he was pledged. But fear for his life was not a thing that ever troubled him. His clear blue eyes had a way of looking, as it were, beyond all such things as the ills of this life. His heart was fixed in regions where bodily hurt could find no place. If the Master had sent him hither, that was enough. With what meed of success the Master would crown his efforts was no concern of his. His was just to obey, to do—to die, if need be.

But so simply and naturally did he speak of these things that it was hard to realize the full import of the words.

However, no decisions as to the future course of the

Dautrays was to be made till Quebec had been reached, and the family had been introduced to the Sieur de la Salle, and heard the plan proposed by him with regard to this territory to be discovered. He would need bold pioneers to accompany him, and the lads could take their choice of masters. But if the Sieur de la Salle thought them too young for his work, Father Fritz was willing to take them with him, if their father approved their going.

“It seems to me, Gaspard,” said Claude, with something of the look in his blue eyes that shone so often in those of Father Fritz, “that to save souls for God is a nobler work than to discover new lands for an earthly king.”

Gaspard bent his head in silent assent. He, too, had come to believe that to go through the world with Father Fritz would be the most blessed of lives; but they kept their thoughts to themselves for the most part, and eagerly awaited the arrival of their little vessel at the city of Quebec.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT LEADER.

“**Y**ONDER, my friends, is the sail of the vessel in which the Sieur de la Salle has set forth. We shall come up with him yet, ere we reach the stronghold of Quebec.”

Eagerly, breathlessly, with eyes aglow, and hearts beating fast in expectant joy, the three brothers stood together in the bow of the little vessel, and watched the wonderful panorama of wood, rock, and water slipping silently by.

They had reached it at last! The great western continent lay before their eyes! They were sailing slowly up that mighty estuary of the St. Lawrence. Land on either side could be descried—wild lands, scarce trodden by foot of man—waiting, as it seemed, for them to come and explore and reclaim. They had passed the great Isle d’Anticosti; they were within the mighty river’s mouth. It was like the realization of some strange, wild dream. They had no eyes save for the distant vistas of grand wild country visible on either hand. They had not even noted the sails of a vessel also glid-

ing up the estuary. It was the words of Father Fritz that recalled them to themselves.

They looked then, and saw the larger vessel, which was making but slow progress in the very light breeze. Their own lighter craft was visibly gaining upon her.

“Is that the ship in which the *Sieur de la Salle* has sailed?” asked Gaspard, with suddenly aroused interest.

“Even so. I scarce thought we should come up with it again, having lost so much time near to the start. But that is she without doubt, and if the wind drops, as seems like, we may lie becalmed together awhile, ere we can make Quebec. We will gain her side if possible, and hear how she has fared upon the voyage. You shall see for yourselves, my sons, the man of whom I have told you many things. It may be that you will learn to know him well ere we have seen this adventure through.”

The keen interest of the three lads was instantly stirred. They had, indeed, heard many things of the *Sieur de la Salle* from others beside the father himself. They were ready to admire—to dread him also, for he had won a name for severity and hardness even amongst those who admired and respected him. They longed to see for themselves a man who had travelled so far, who had given up so much for the sake of a grand project, and who was now fired with the determination to risk all for the sake of this great discovery.

Had he chosen he could have lived at ease, and with almost royal honours, at Fort Frontenac, at the head of

Lake Ontario, where he planted a fur-trading colony, and had almost obtained absolute rights over a vast territory. But the restless spirit of the adventurer was upon him. He had heard and gathered up every rumour respecting the existence of that mighty river the Mississippi, about which the wildest tales were told by the Indians who dwelt upon its northern tributaries, and by various travellers from many European lands, who had made endeavours to trace its mighty course, and had given out most strange and contradictory reports as to where it emptied itself at last into the sea.

To follow the course of this mighty river, to plant colonies along its banks, to divert to its great waterway the whole of the fur-trade of the north, and bring inexhaustible riches into France in consequence—this was the aim and object for which La Salle had given up present prosperity, had crossed the ocean to obtain the king's sanction and assistance, and was now on his way back with the royal commission secured to him.

All this was well known to the Dautray boys by this time, and the tale had filled them with admiration and wonder. They themselves were fired with the desire to do and dare, and to follow this bold man and those who would accompany him into the heart of the savage country; so, when they actually found themselves drawing near inch by inch to the vessel which contained him and his company, they were full of ardour and anticipation.

The wind was dropping to a dead calm. The smaller vessel glided alongside the larger one, and friendly

voices hailed Father Fritz and his crew. The father was not exactly of La Salle's company, but he had sailed from La Rochelle with him, and La Salle entertained for him a warm esteem and affection.

This was the more remarkable in that La Salle had a known suspicion and dislike to ecclesiastics in general; and, although Father Fritz belonged to no recognized order of monks or friars, he was a priest, and went forth as such into all lands, and preached, and baptized, and performed all priestly offices.

At one time La Salle had had intimate relations with the Jesuits—too intimate perhaps, for he now entertained a profound distrust of them. He would have no dealings with them that he could avoid; and when he went into savage countries he declined to permit any Jesuit to be of his party. He would take in place of such (for all exploring parties must have ecclesiastics with them for the conversion of the heathen Indian to the faith of Christ) some Récollet or Franciscan friar, with several of whom he was on fairly friendly terms, although to none did he give that personal trust and love that he bestowed upon Father Fritz.

A boat was lowered from La Salle's vessel, and a message was sent asking the father to go to La Salle on board his ship. This invitation was at once accepted, and Dautray and his sons were invited to accompany the father.

This they eagerly consented to do, and in a short time the whole party stood upon the white deck of the

larger vessel, and were greeted in friendly fashion by a tall, dark-faced man, with a pair of piercing eagle eyes, who grasped Father Fritz by both hands, and imprinted a kiss upon each cheek.

“You are welcome, my father,” he said. “We had feared that some ill might have befallen thee. But Heaven watches over thee always. Neither wind nor wave has hindered us greatly this voyage. And who are these that stand beside thee? Methinks they were not with thee when thou didst leave La Rochelle.”

“They were picked up in mid-ocean half dead with hunger and thirst. They shall tell thee their history in their own time. Methinks in them thou wilt find able and eager followers. Dautray is their name. The lads have both French and English blood in their veins. It is of such that the most bold and hardy travellers are made.”

The first speaker turned his penetrating eyes full upon the little group a few paces from him. They saw more distinctly the thin, sallow face, embrowned by years of exposure to all weathers, the thin-lipped, resolute mouth, the aquiline nose with the open, sensitive nostril, and the furrowed brow which bespoke a nervous and irritable temperament, though the iron will might subdue the outward indications of it. La Salle was but five-and-thirty years of age at that time, yet he looked older than his years. Care, responsibility, disappointment, and restless eagerness of disposition had all left traces upon his face. He was a man that, once seen, was not

likely to be forgotten. The Dautray brothers, looking earnestly upon him, felt that here indeed was a leader amongst men, who would have power to impose his will upon all with whom he came in contact.

“Dautray, Dautray!” repeated La Salle, his eyes fixed full upon the group at the vessel’s side. “I, too, have a Dautray on board. Can they be akin? Go, call Dautray to us, one of you fellows,” he added to some sailors standing by; and the next minute a man appeared from below, who, after staring hard at Jean for full half a minute, greeted him warmly as his brother, and fell upon his neck.

It was indeed so. The brothers, parted in boyhood, had met in this strange fashion upon the deck of La Salle’s vessel out in the Far West. Their astonishment and joy provoked a smile, even from the stern-faced La Salle. Pierre Dautray was a year or two older than his brother. He, too, was a widower, and had one son, Louis, also on board. He had left his native land mainly on account of the grievous imposts and taxation which ground the wretched peasantry down to the very dust. He felt within him energy and power. He knew that in France it was hopeless to try to raise himself to a better position. If one hapless village succeeded through the thrift and skill of its inhabitants in paying its share of the imposts demanded, it was not secure from further demands. For if the adjoining hamlets were unable to furnish the required sum, then the deficit was demanded from those who had proved themselves ready

to pay their own dues, and there was nothing but misery and hopeless, helpless suffering everywhere. Pierre Dautray, vexed to his soul, and in grievous indignation at the injustice of the administration, had vowed to leave a land where such things were permitted. He long looked eagerly towards the West, hearing golden promises of lands to be given to those who would go forth to colonize them; and when news reached him that the *Sieur de la Salle* was about to sally forth again, and was seeking bold men to accompany him on his mighty mission of exploration and colonization, he and his son had made up their minds to join the party—and here they were in the Far West, ready to go with their leader to the world's end if need be.

All this was rapidly spoken between the brothers, whilst *La Salle* stood a little apart, listening to the account *Father Fritz* gave of his journey, yet hearing almost every word spoken by the group so near to him. Something in the eager aspect of the lads, in the stalwart proportions of *Jules*—who had by this time completely recovered his wonted health and strength—in the aspect of the family, partly pleased him. He had the gift of knowing men at a glance, and although he was often forced to work with bad material, he was quick to recognize sterling stuff when he found it.

When the eager colloquy between the brothers and cousins had ended, he stepped forward and looked *Jean Dautray* and his sons well over.

“*Father Fritz* tells me, my friends, that you have

been driven away from your home in England through the jealous distrust of envious neighbours, even as men have been driven from France through the grievous and heavy imposts levied upon the peasantry. The eyes of all persecuted or enslaved persons are turning westward in these days, as is but natural, seeing that here is a great country where every man may build and plant and sow and reap, and where, if he can keep his land free from the spoiling hand of the Indian, he has no other foe to fear. Along the banks of this great river upon whose bosom we are even now sailing, fertile lands may be had by all the sons of France who ask them of the governor. Seed will be given them to plant, and they will receive paternal care and guidance so long as they need it. His Majesty watches over this new-born colony with tender interest. He would make for France a new kingdom, the foundations of which are already laid. When you have reached Quebec you will see for yourselves what has already been done, and what a great future lies before those who will follow the dictates of their brave hearts, and set themselves to the great task which lies before us !”

There was a buzz of applause as La Salle uttered these words. The whole company gathered about their leader, eagerly anxious to hear him speak. La Salle was a singularly silent man in the main. He scarcely ever gave an opinion unless directly asked, and he never spoke of what he did not thoroughly understand. When he had seen a thing with his own eyes he would describe

it with clearness and force, but he was always careful to distinguish between what he knew and what he had only heard. This absence of anything like wild talk or the boasting so common in all ages, and particularly in travellers, who have seen what few men can claim to have seen, gave to his words a singular value, and all who knew him learned quickly to appreciate this quality, and to give a quick and absolute credence to everything spoken by him. They might not like his words. They might take offence at them, but at least they would believe them, and listen with a certain respect.

Throughout the voyage the leader had maintained an almost absolute silence. He had watched and studied the characters of the men whom he had taken with him, but he had spoken almost nothing of his own purposes. They therefore listened the more eagerly now that his lips were unsealed, and pressed closely about him to learn what he had to say.

La Salle told them plainly that, when once at Quebec, they could make free choice of the life they preferred to lead. He told them of the lands along the river bank laid out in small holdings, which were granted to French subjects almost free from imposts, and which, if tilled and planted and cared for, would yield abundant increase. He told how settlers had, through idleness or greed of quicker gains, again and again neglected their lands, seeking to maintain themselves by private trading with the Indians—a thing forbidden by law—and how misery and disaster had fallen upon them and upon the community

in consequence. He told how the young men again and again would become infected by the desire after the freedom of Indian life, and would actually run off into the woods and live like savages among the Indians. *Cou-reurs de bois* these creatures were called, and many edicts had been issued against them. But once in the fastnesses of the forest it was hard to lay hands upon them, and the Indians in the main were friendly to all such fugitives, although there was always the risk of meeting a hostile tribe, and suffering a lingering death by fire at the stake.

He spoke plainly of the perils to be encountered from the Indians. He himself had learned their language—several at least of their forms of speech—and was acquainted with many of the chiefs, and with their ways and methods. He had found them friendly in the main; but no one could depend upon the friendship of an Indian tribe. Some private feud amongst themselves might convert friends into enemies in a very short space of time. Jealousies between tribe and tribe were fruitful causes of vexation and bewilderment. Those who went amongst them ran risks of many kinds, but for all that it was the Indians who held in their hand the fur-trade, that great and boundless source of wealth; and if La Salle could but carry out his great scheme, that trade, instead of being diverted into half a dozen channels, and being carried off to a great extent by the English and Dutch settlers in Albany, might be monopolized entirely for the benefit of France, and a vast stream of wealth be poured

into her coffers, whilst those who discovered and organized this vast scheme might be made rich for life.

With a piece of charred wood La Salle drew upon the white floor of the deck a rough map of the country he was bent upon exploring. He traced the course of the St. Lawrence river up to Lake Ontario, and showed how that lake was connected with Lake Erie beyond. Then he roughly indicated the position of Lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior, but took most pains in showing the positions of the small tributary rivers such as the Kankakee, taking their rise very near to the southern extremity of Lake Michigan in the country of the Miamis, and joining the larger river of the Illinois, which emptied itself into the great Mississippi, the course of which La Salle was now fully assured lay almost directly to the south, and emptied its mighty volume of water into the great Gulf of Mexico. He told them of the discoveries of other explorers, of Champlain and Marquette. He sought not to impress his listeners with any false ideas as to his own prowess, or the extent of his own personal researches. He simply stated what he had heard and what he believed, and showed how, if once the trade of that vast country draining itself into the Mississippi could be brought under the control of France, a ceaseless stream of wealth would be diverted to the parent country, and how a prosperous colony might be formed. As it was, the perils of winter navigation, the severities of climate, the proximity of other nations in the northern lands, made constant havoc.

of the monopoly of France, which every Frenchman claimed as her due. But let the Mississippi once be the only road, and let it be colonized and guarded by a chain of forts all occupied by Frenchmen—let the river's mouth be guarded, and the shipping protected in the same way, and what glory, what wealth, what immeasurable importance would France not gain! She would become the mistress of the world, and would maintain that position with ease and security. And they, the pioneers of this great enterprise, would reap eternal glory for their reward, to say nothing of the wealth and position which would be the natural outcome of success.

It was just the kind of wild, chimerical project to fire the blood of the men who heard it laid down. The colossal proportions of the task could not be grasped by the minds of those who heard La Salle speak. Men's minds were full of wild, fantastic notions with regard to this great western continent, and eagerly caught at any scheme which promised adventure, wealth, and glory. La Salle was a man of boundless confidence and ambition—not sordid ambition for personal advancement, but the more noble ambition to achieve a great end. He did not disguise the dangers which must lie before them. He plainly counselled all who were afraid, to remain in Quebec, and content themselves with small grants of land from the governor, and the founding of seignories along the river banks there between Quebec and Montreal, where they could dwell in comparative safety.

But after the glowing words just heard, such an ending to their voyage seemed tame and colourless. Scarce a dozen of the men who heard were daunted by the thought of peril, or were prepared to abandon the great enterprise before them. As for the Dautray family, both the French and semi-English branch were alike eager to follow La Salle. He looked upon the faces surrounding him with penetrating glance, and his dark face softened slightly at what he read in the looks of his company.

“My friends,” he said, “if we can trust each other, and remain faithful to each other, and let no discouragements daunt us, I verily believe that our undertaking will be crowned with success. Yet it may be a question of years before we arrive at our goal, and those years will be full of toil and hardship—perhaps of trouble and disappointment too. Let no man who is not prepared for all this seek to be of our company.”

Jean Dautray stepped up to the leader and said,—

“Sir, I would offer my poor services and those of my eldest son here, upon whose strength and courage I can well rely. As for these younger striplings, it is for you, sir, to say if they be yet strong enough for the task that lies before them. Willing and eager hearts they have, I trow well; but they have not the strength yet of their brother. To go with you or with Father Fritz amongst the haunts of the wild Indians is indeed the dearest wish of their hearts. It will not be the spirit that will be lacking. If they fail, it will be through weakness of flesh.”

La Salle turned his keen gaze upon Gaspard and Claude, who stood by quivering with excitement. Just for the moment their young hearts were aflame after adventure and the perils of the pioneer work. They were half fascinated by the strong personality of La Salle, and felt that they could follow him to the world's end.

La Salle read this enthusiasm in their flushed faces and sparkling eyes, and something like a smile came into his own, as he turned his glance from them to Father Fritz.

"The lads have the right spirit in them," he said in a low voice to the father.

"They have courage, they have endurance: methinks they have finer qualities even than those. They will be true, I take it, even to the death. More we cannot ask of any."

"Yet they are young and unseasoned," spoke La Salle, thoughtfully eyeing the lads, and then he looked up and spoke in a pleasant voice that was not without an accent of command in its tones,—

"My lads," he said, "you are brave lads, I can see that in your faces; yet you have seen little of wild life, and you are young for my work. Go then awhile first with Father Fritz, who will not tarry, as I must do, in Quebec, to gather together what I shall need for my journey. I know him. He will set forth almost at once upon his mission to the Indians. Go you with him, if he will take you, and thus you shall learn something of the nature of the task that lies before us. Father Fritz

will later join me and my party, for so he has promised; and when he comes, you come also, if so be that you can stand the life of exposure and toil. We shall soon see then the stuff of which you are made." Then, as if that subject were closed altogether, he turned to Dautray and Jules, and entered into a brief colloquy with them, accepting them willingly as volunteers for his proposed expedition, and giving to them a few more detailed explanations as to what lay immediately before them.

It was with great satisfaction he heard that the silent Jules knew something of shipbuilding. Jules had spent many of his winters in the shipbuilding yards of Southampton, and knew much about the making of vessels. Dautray himself was no unskilled man either at blacksmith's forge or carpenter's bench. He and his sons had been able amongst them to do almost all the repairs and construction needed on their own holding in England, and La Salle felt that in them he should have two faithful and valuable assistants.

He brought them to the notice of his friend and lieutenant (if the name is applicable), one Henri, Sieur de Tonty, an Italian by birth, and a man of dauntless courage and boundless resource. He had been disabled from his soldier life by having one of his hands blown off by a grenade in the Sicilian wars, but, in spite of this crippling, he retained a wonderful energy and love of adventure, as well as a bright and fearless spirit which nothing could daunt. He was as frank and open as La Salle was grave and reserved. Perhaps that was

why the taciturn leader was able to make a friend of him so easily. Tonty greeted the Dautrays kindly and cheerily, clapped the lads on the shoulder and spoke encouraging words to them; and then, as the shades of evening were gathering, they were sent back to their own little vessel, and the two anchored side by side for the night, hoping for a favouring wind in the morning which would take them into the city of Quebec.

That wish was granted. At midnight a breeze sprang up. Anchors were lifted, and the vessels sailed side by side up the estuary. The Dautray boys awoke to find themselves gliding along the narrowing river's mouth, and when they reached deck, eager to lose nothing of what was passing, they were opposite Tadoussac, where the first signs of man's habitation began to be seen here and there along the green banks.

With breathless excitement they regarded the beetling rocks of Mal Bay, and the foaming waterfalls and wonderful gorges that from time to time greeted their straining eyes. Father Fritz came and stood beside them, pointing out here and there some object of more interest than another, and bidding them watch for the mountain Cape Tourmente, with its growth of dark forests round which the clouds seemed to hover darkly. Then came gentler and softer scenes, rich meadow land bordering the shores, and lands laid out in some sort of cultivation, with their log-houses at the edge of the clearing. Then, after passing the wild and beautiful cataract of Montmorenci and the Island of Orleans, upon which signs of habitation

were plainly visible, the promontory of Quebec towered up before their wondering eyes, crowned by its frowning citadel, upon which the September sun beat down in sultry fierceness.

Below the citadel clustered many roofs, first of the upper, then of the lower town. Father Fritz pointed out some of the more notable buildings, convent, monastery, the Hôtel Dieu, and the church of Notre Dame. But the vessels were drawing already to their anchorage. Greetings and salutations were reaching them from all sides. Father Fritz was called for in half a dozen directions at once. The Dautray brothers stepped ashore with a dazed feeling that the goal of their ambition was gained at last.

They had reached the Far West.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW WORLD.

IT was all so wonderful!

Gaspard and Claude had spent three whole days wandering through the streets of Quebec, and their curiosity and admiration were yet unsated. Father Fritz had been their guide during his leisure hours. He had sketched to them the checkered history of that natural fortress since the days when Champlain's axemen had attacked the mass of walnut trees then covering the strand, and had built themselves a wooden fortress and houses upon the savage rock, up till the present time when massive buildings of stone, and a small but increasing township stood there, and a French Count—the celebrated Count Frontenac—ruled as governor for the King of France, and Quebec was becoming one of the keys to the great new world.

The marvellous situation of the place never ceased to strike the boys with wonder and admiration. The sudden constriction of that vast waterway to a passage but a mile wide, just above the Island of Orleans, the great frowning cliffs on one side, and the green heights of Pont Levi on the other, the wonderful citadel tower-

ing above them and overlooking the upper and lower towns alike aroused their wonder and admiration. They had been into the church of Notre Dame, and had marvelled at the solidity of its construction; they had wandered round the Jesuit College, and conversed with the brothers there, who seemed well acquainted with Father Fritz, and who were eagerly pleased to welcome any new-comers from Europe, and hear all the news of the country they still called home. They had listened to wonderful stories of the holy Mother Mary of the Incarnation, and her pupils and nuns in the Convent of the Ursulines; and had visited the trading magazines of the lower town with their wealth of furs ready for shipment for France; and had even been admitted within the château of St. Louis and seen the governor seated in a large hall in earnest talk with his friend and countryman La Salle, whose scheme of exploration and colonization he was ardently forwarding.

The two brothers, Gaspard and Claude, were lodged with Father Fritz at the tavern of honest Jaques Boisedon, situated in the square near to the church. The two elder Dautray brothers and Jules were in the lower town near to the wharf, engaged upon certain matters connected with the unloading of the vessel, and preparations for the expedition in which they were now regularly enrolled. That expedition, could not start immediately. There was much to think of, much to be done first. It was likely that Father Fritz might make a far earlier start upon his mission to the Indians, and that

the two parties might meet later on when the advancing season should perhaps drive them into temporary winter quarters.

Absorbing as was the admiration with which the brothers observed everything in the place, their interest was excited most keenly of all by the sight of the Indians walking about, in all manner of odd dress and undress. Many of these were strong, stalwart men, with a look of nobility upon their hawk-like faces. But upon too many of them there were signs of drunken debauchery which had robbed them of such savage dignity as they had once possessed. These poor wretches looked little better than the brute beasts of the field, and upon the face of Father Fritz there would steal a look of infinite compassion and unspeakable sternness as his glance fell upon some wretched creature gibbering or moaning or raving in the clutches of the demon of drunkenness, and he would turn to his pupils and say in tones of ringing indignation,—

“See what has been wrought in these lands by men professing the faith of Christ!”

The boys heard much of the burning question of the liquor trade with the Indians. Those ignorant and savage races had already imbibed a passionate love of the fiery drink of the white man, which could raise them to such ecstatic heights of frenzy and delight. To sell or give brandy to the natives had been a sure passport to favour, and was one of the greatest resources of the pioneers in making their way into new countries.

But only too soon came the natural result of the traffic in scenes of debauchery and horror which had scandalized the Christian community, and given rise to legislation against it. The Jesuits, who were still the paramount power in the place—though their power was on the wane, and Count Frontenac was unfriendly towards them—had issued many edicts against the traffic, and had done much to impose restraints; but alas! with the subtlety of their order, and their inherently crooked ways, they had secretly carried on the traffic themselves, although under attempted limitations; arguing that to fill their own coffers with gold, which gold should be employed for the glory of God, condoned and excused a breach of their own laws, to which, perhaps, they held themselves superior.

These things were known to Father Fritz, and filled him with a holy wrath and indignation. Sometimes this indignation found vent in burning words.

“Think of it!” he cried one day, as they passed a group of Indians at a street corner, some lying in sodden stupidity, some dancing and raving like maniacs, all stamped with a brutality of aspect that was terrible to see. “Think of it! each one of those wretched creatures possesses an immortal soul, and each soul is of *infinite* value in the eyes of the Heavenly Father. The Son of God died upon the cross to save yonder impotent, ignorant beings; and yet the servants of Christ—baptized men, vowed to His service—help to transform them into monsters of brutality from whom even the

beasts of the field turn in loathing and contempt. Ah, will not God judge? will not He avenge? Will not the day come when the blood of our brothers—ay, and their souls too—will be demanded at our hands; and we shall stand with shamed faces and breaking hearts before a righteous and wrathful Judge, and hear His terrible sentence pronounced upon us, ‘Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity?’”

Gaspard and Claude shrank back at the sound of these words, and exclaimed in one breath,—

“Not you, father, ah, not you! You have done no ill. You are ever doing good and seeking to snatch souls from the coming wrath.”

But there was still the same look of infinite sadness and thoughtful sternness upon the father’s face.

“My children,” he said, “how God may deal with each one of us as individuals, I know not. I trust and hope in His mercy, and under the shadow of His wings do I look to find safety and rest when the battle of life be past. But what lies heavy upon my soul is the terrible falling away of the Christian church from the pure doctrine and ordinances given her at the beginning for the work of the ministry and for the perfecting of the saints. She has not gone on to perfection. She has not attained the stature and fullness of Christ. She is not abiding in love and joy and hope, nor in the bond of peace. She is rent and split into hostile camps. She is at war with her own members. Instead of being, like Mount Zion, the joy of the whole earth, she is as

Babylon, the city of confusion. And will not the Lord judge? will He not punish? will He not demand of her those gifts and graces with which He endowed her, and which she has scorned and slighted? O my children, my heart bleeds for the thought of what the Lord must feel as He looks down upon His scattered and divided Church, His desolate heritage and defiled sanctuary! And is it enough to comfort our souls with the thought that perhaps we as individuals may find mercy in His sight? Must not we shed tears of blood for the desolations we see in the earth, and bear upon our hearts in intercession and prayer and confession of sin, the burden of generations of unfaithful service and coldness of faith?"

Talk such as this, into which Father Fritz was frequently bursting, as sign after sign appeared of man's sinfulness and the imperfect service rendered even by those who called themselves the dedicated servants of God, could not but make an impression upon the sensitive spirits of the two boys of whom at the moment he was taking charge. Although his words were often far above their understanding, they had a spiritual perception of their meaning, and began to awake to a sense of ardent longing to do some act of service for the Master, whom Father Fritz strove so ardently to serve with purity of heart and singleness of purpose. They heard his words of loving counsel or of stern admonition. They noted how he invariably recoiled from all that savoured of hypocrisy or time-serving;

how he would not stoop for one instant to a petty deceit even to obtain what seemed a great good. The Jesuit doctrine of doing evil that good might come was abhorrent to him. It roused within him a holy indignation which awoke answering thrills in the hearts of the boys. Amid a religious community where the leaven of such doctrines had worked for a hundred years, it was scarce to be wondered at that Father Fritz could find no spiritual home. The evil mixing with much that was good and true poisoned for him the whole system. He would have none of it.

It was hardly wonderful, then, that he should have elected at last to leave a continent where nothing but strife, envy, and persecution could be found, and strive in a newer and more primitive state of things to find those who would seek to follow Christ without the strife of tongues and the distraction of contrary winds of doctrine.

Even here the poison of jealousies and divisions had found a home. Numbers of the more recent immigrants were Protestants, escaping from the persecutions they met with in their own lands. To these men the Jesuits were bitterly opposed, and would not admit that their baptism was baptism at all, or that Indians converted by them were of the true faith of Christ.

This teaching was horrible to the more enlightened Father Fritz, who both believed himself, and strove to make others believe, in the mystical unity of the one body, the church, and continually advanced the words

“one faith, one hope, one baptism,” in support of a teaching far in advance of the days in which he lived. Small wonder was it that he had been coldly regarded by ecclesiastics in many lands, although personally he was much respected and beloved. They could not understand such doctrine. Neither Protestant nor Romanist was ready to acknowledge a universal brotherhood in Christ. And so the father had been forced, heavy-hearted and sad, to leave behind his own enlightened continent, to strive and bring the true light of the One Gospel into this savage land as yet sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

This was not Father Fritz's first visit to the western world. He had been here before, and he found many friends on his return. One amongst these was the Récollet friar, Hennepin, of the order of St. Francis, who encountered the trio in the street not long after their arrival, and seized Father Fritz by the hand with warm words of greeting.

The boys had heard of Father Hennepin already, and gazed curiously at him. He was a big man, who looked as though possessed of a dauntless courage, as indeed he was. His voice was deep and jovial; he spoke heartily, and without any of the customary sanctimoniousness of the monk. He had not the spirituality of expression that was so striking in Father Fritz; and there was a certain sly twinkle in the eye which betrayed something of the subtlety from which hardly any monk-trained man escaped. But he was possessed of

pleasant address and hearty good-will of manner, and was plainly not a little rejoiced to meet his former friend.

“The very man out of all the world that I would have had for a companion!” he said. “Listen here, my brother; I have hastened down through Montreal from Fort Frontenac, where I have been this last year or more, to welcome back the *Sieur de la Salle*. I have heard from him of the notable enterprise planned, and right gladly would I join in it. But there is work—much work—to be done nearer home ere I could with a clear conscience start forth upon it. Now if thou wilt join with me in this work, we shall the sooner be able to effect a junction with the party of exploration, and take our share in the great things to be achieved.”

“What can I do?” asked Father Fritz, whilst the boys listened eagerly, for if the father started forth upon some immediate expedition, surely they would be permitted to accompany him.

“That I will soon explain,” answered the Franciscan quickly. “It is work we have done together before now;” and he then proceeded to inform his friends of what was in his head.

There were settlements all along the banks of the great river between Quebec and Montreal, and beyond that place were scattered settlements or seigniories, as they were called, right away to Lake Ontario, at the east end of which stood Fort Frontenac, whence he had come to meet La Salle. These scattered settlers could

receive no regular religious instruction, because they were unable to support a priest of their own. Thus they were quite dependent for the offices of the church upon the visits of wandering priests or friars who would say mass, baptize their children, and teach or preach to them. Father Hennepin had it in his heart to pay visits all along the river to these scattered and neglected people, and also to visit some of the Indian converts in the villages, where he was acquainted with the people, and where he had made a small beginning in instructing them.

“But,” said the father frankly, “I have noted that with the Indians thou hast been more successful than I can count myself to have been. So it has come into my head that we might take two canoes, and form two crews. I will land at the seigniories on the river banks, see the French settlers there, and perform the offices of the church, and thou shalt push farther along and make for the homes of the Indians. They will doubtless receive thee gladly, for they remember right well those whom they have trusted and loved. Thus will we travel partly in company, partly alone, and when our mission is accomplished, and we have done our duty towards those in this part, we shall with a clear conscience push onward and join La Salle and his party, who by that time may have completed their preparations, and be ready to advance into these new regions, which I confess I burn to see.”

Gaspard and Claude exchanged eager glances, and

they hung upon the father's next words. Surely if he went, he might take them with him, and to behold the Indians in their own homes, and see what life was like amongst them, was the very foremost desire of their hearts.

"I will very gladly share thy project, and see my former friends the Indians," answered Father Fritz readily. "I grieve to see so much drunkenness and evil living among those that come into the precincts of the city. Perchance in their own villages this curse is less. It is pain and grief to me that we Christian men should so debase those whom we should strive to raise and bless."

Father Hennepin shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, that is the work of the Jesuits," he answered, being himself no friend to that order. "Count Frontenac has traced almost all the liquor trade to those foxes, who profess to seek to stop it. But, after all, if one did not sell, another would. The creatures are bent upon getting it. True, it makes beasts of them, and they ruin their health and perish by scores. But that is no great evil in the opinion of many. There be those who advocate even the poisoning of drink, that whole tribes may be exterminated at once."

The eyes of Father Fritz flashed under their white brows.

"A truly Christ-like doctrine!" he said.

"Oh, of course 'tis very wrong; but human nature is frail, and the raids of the Iroquois have been a curse

and a torment. At Montreal it has been terrible. On the mainland men have gone in fear of their lives. Some years it has scarce been worth while to seek to till the land and garner the crops. The Indians have fallen upon everything. Men have been carried off in broad daylight, and never seen again. Doubtless they have died at the stake in torments unspeakable. Small wonder that they curse the Indians, and would fain destroy them root and branch."

"Nay, nay, nay; the Indians are human creatures even like ourselves, and though wild and untamed as the beasts of the field, they have souls and spirits which can be trained and brought under the power of the love of God. That is our task—not the extermination of the bodies, but the reclaiming of the souls. We have not found them fierce or cruel towards us, brother. Doth not that show that if we approach them in the love of the Lord, He has power even over their wild savagery, and can bring them into subjection to Him?"

"Ah, well, you are the man for them, brother. They understand that kind of teaching, and I have often thought we need such in our dealings with them. And who be these youths gazing upon us so eagerly? Neophytes of thine?—impregnated with thy doctrines? Hast thou brought them out with thee to found a new order of mercy out in those wilds?"

"Nay, I am no founder of any new order. I seek rather to find and re-establish the apostolic order which men have forgotten and overlaid. These be two lads of

French and English blood, who have come to seek a home out in the western wilds. Their father is with La Salle, but these striplings have been thought something young for his party. They are to belong to me for the time being. They will travel with me amongst the Indians. I have been seeking to teach them the Indian tongue. Doubtless in time they may be of great value, for they have ready hearts and willing limbs, and can turn their hands to many tasks."

The boys' faces brightened at these kindly words of praise, and the face of Father Hennepin put on a benignant aspect.

"Very good, very good; we want to train up successors to take our places, and the lads have likely faces. Then, brother, shall we start off after Sunday next? We must have each a canoe and Indians to propel it. We must take provision for the journey, and I must have my vessels and portable chapel, so that I can say mass at the seigniories as we go. I have found my Indians already. Doubtless you will have small trouble in doing the like. I for my part put more faith in the Algonquins than the Iroquois, but there be good and bad in all tribes alike, and thou dost know them almost as well as I."

Father Hennepin with a smile and a nod went on his way, and Gaspard turned eagerly upon Father Fritz.

"Oh, father," he said earnestly, "thou wilt take us with thee?"

“I will gladly do so, if ye both be fully resolved to risk your lives in such an enterprise. But know, my boys, that all who go forth in these strange lands, and amongst these wild untaught people, carry their lives in their hands. Setting aside all perils by land and by water (and these are more than ye yet know), we have to face savage men, who may turn upon us with fury one day, although at the first they may receive us well. Some sudden outbreak of jealous rage, the very meaning of which we know not, may cause them to become our mortal foes; and then only the mercy of the Lord can save us, and it may be that He will have us glorify Him by our deaths rather than in our lives. Terrible things are told of these Indians. They can practise unheard-of cruelties upon their helpless victims if they are minded to do so. Their own prisoners they reserve after battle, to put to death by fire at the stake, with many refinements of cruelty with which I will not horrify your ears. That fate may be ours if we go amongst them. Think if ye can risk such a death. True, I have never been in peril from their fierceness yet. But I am far from saying I shall always meet with such hospitality and friendliness. Jealousy of the encroachments of the white men may, and probably will, work more and more powerfully amongst them as time goes on. Our beads and baubles, our drink and tobacco, please them well now; but the time may come when they will think they are paying dear for these things, and when they will combine together

against the white invaders. And if so, it is upon the pioneers that their first vengeance will fall."

But these words did not daunt the boys in the least. Love for Father Fritz, intense curiosity about the Indians, the innate love of adventure burning within them, all combined to banish fear and to inspire them with eagerness for the enterprise. Nor were they without that desire to plant the banner of Christ upon the Indian soil which was burning in the heart of Father Fritz. They had not been with him all these weeks without catching something of the missionary enthusiasm which inspired him.

"We shall follow you to the world's end—for life or death," they answered; and he took their hands in his a moment, and so holding them, blessed them.

Now all was hurry and eager bustle. Down by the water's edge were crafts of all sorts, some loading, some unloading, and amongst these shot in and out the bark canoes of the Indians, with their dusky occupants flitting hither and thither. Father Fritz stood silently watching these with his keenly observant eyes, and when one large and graceful little bark shot suddenly alongside the wharf where he was standing, he signed to the fine-looking Indian who sat motionless, paddle in hand, within it, and beckoned him to approach.

Gaspard and Claude stood beside him as the colloquy proceeded, and strove eagerly to understand what passed. Father Fritz had a remarkable gift for language, speaking not only most of the European tongues with ease, but

also several of the Indian dialects. He had taken some pains during the long hours of the voyage to teach these latter tongues to the Dautray boys, who had been eager to learn. They had found upon arriving at Quebec that they were able to hold a limited converse with some amongst the Indians walking about, and had lost no opportunity of enlarging their vocabulary. They could now follow the drift of the talk going on between the father and the Indian, and soon felt sure that the man was assenting readily to the request that he should be their conductor up the river in this very canoe lying beneath them.

The boys looked at it eagerly. It was long, and gracefully though strongly built, capable of holding half a dozen persons. The prow was carved to the similitude of a bird's head, and the boys gave to the craft the name of the *Swan*. The Indian was a fine specimen of his race, and his brown body showed the scars of many wounds obtained in conflicts with hostile tribes. His name was a strange one. The boys could not frame their lips to pronounce it. They called him instead Swanalulu, and to this name he learned quickly to answer with flashing smiles that showed a double row of white teeth. He seemed from the first to be very friendly, not to the father only, but also to the boys; and to take keen interest in the thought of pioneering the party up the river, and accompanying them to the haunt of his brown brethren along the banks of the mighty river.

Dautray was ready enough to let his sons go under the care of Fathers Fritz and Hennepin. It was thought that the meeting with the expedition under La Salle would take place a month or six weeks later at Fort Frontenac, which might be regarded as the last outpost of civilization. Beyond that fort lay an almost unexplored country, divided between innumerable tribes of wild Indians. A few hardy explorers had visited one or other of the great rivers or lakes during the century, bringing back reports of greater or less veracity. But little definite was known, save that some mighty river did take its rise beyond the chain of giant lakes, and ran a course of thousands of miles to the south before emptying itself into the Gulf of Mexico.

To learn more of this mysterious region, and to win wealth and glory for France, was the task to which La Salle was pledged; to seek to establish amongst the heathen Indians the knowledge and love of God and His Christ was the aim and object of Father Fritz; and to work together and in harmony was the desire of both.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WILDS WITH FATHER FRITZ.

AWAY, away, to the West! The light birch-bark canoe, propelled by the strong and skilful arms of Swanalulu, shot through the gleaming waters of the vast river. Gaspard had already learned to ply the paddle with a strength and skill which won him many an approving word from the father, and many a beaming smile from the stalwart Indian.

They had gazed with wrapt curiosity at the little seigniories and holdings lying along the river banks between Quebec and the outlying colony of Montreal. They had heard Father Hennepin say mass in his portable chapel at one of these places before they parted company and took their separate journey along the upper reaches of the river.

At first the boys, Protestant by training, had glanced uncertainly at one another as the idea of attending mass was suggested to them. But looking to Father Fritz for direction, they saw a gentle smile creep into his eyes, and he said,—

“My children, out here in these wilds, let us forget all

differences of opinions, all strivings and heart-burnings. Let us only remember that we are all children of God, and heirs of salvation through the death of the Lord Jesus. Let us worship Him together in unity and love, showing forth the mystery of His blessed Passion until He come again."

So Protestant and Romanist had knelt side by side, with the voice of the great river sounding in their ears and telling its endless story; the Indian crouching reverently just without the door, following the service in his own peculiar fashion, and bending his head in token of reverence and submission to the Great Spirit.

Then with friendly words of farewell they had left Father Hennepin to his task of visitation amongst the scattered settlers, and had appointed Fort Frontenac as the meeting-place later on, which place was to be the general rendezvous of the whole exploring party, La Salle himself desiring to get there before the winter settled down upon the great country.

Now the frail canoe had passed the settlement of Montreal, and the eager boys found themselves in the vast solitudes of a world of wood and water, where it seemed to them as though the foot of white man could scarce have trod before.

"Come to my people," Swanalulu had pleaded, as his native reserve melted before the friendly good-fellowship of the two boys, and the simple yet heavenly teachings of Father Fritz. The Indian had picked up enough of the French tongue to understand much of what passed

between the father and his pupils, and he listened with avidity to the beautiful and simple truths of Christianity and universal brotherhood as expounded by the enlightened and great-souled Father Fritz. He began to have a dim understanding of the eternal fatherhood of God, such as had never been obtained by him during his many visits to Quebec, and his intercourse with the Jesuits there.

“Come to my people,” he had said. “They live in darkness. They are smitten by a great sickness. They die like dogs, and there is none to help or comfort them. Come and tell them of the Great Spirit. Give them medicine, and teach them these things. They will then bless you and follow you to the world’s end.”

Father Fritz found upon inquiry that Swanalulu belonged to one of the many sections of the great Algonquin tribe, and that he dwelt upon the banks of the upper reaches of the Ottawa River. That country was unknown to him, but he was willing to go wherever a door seemed to open, and as for the boys, anything that promised adventure in strange lands filled them with joy.

The journey hitherto had been wonderful, but simple, inasmuch as the great waterway between Quebec and Montreal was being constantly navigated, and all difficulties were speedily and readily overcome.

Now they were launched upon waters comparatively seldom traversed, save by the flitting canoes of the Indians, and here a new world seemed to unfold before them.

With breathless wonder they soon beheld the foaming rapids of Carillon, dashing and boiling with such fury and power that a near approach was impossible.

“Now we must walk,” said Father Fritz, cheerfully. “Swanalulu will bring the canoe after us along the forest track.”

The Indian smiled and nodded, and quickly directed the little craft towards the bank. Then the three travellers loaded themselves with such impedimenta as they had brought with them, and commenced to force their way through the tangled brushwood of the forest, whilst their companion shouldered the light canoe upon his stalwart back, and marched behind them, chanting a rude song in his native tongue, or imitating the cry of the wild birds and beasts for the amusement of the boys.

It was a grand sight to see the river foaming along beneath them in its turbulent course. The wonders of this mighty forest land fascinated the boys completely.

“I would we could found here a colony, and live always in these wilds, and teach the natives, and convert them to the faith of Christ, and build up a beautiful church here on the river’s bank, where all men might worship God in spirit and in truth!” cried Claude, as he looked up into the giant trees, which seemed to form a natural temple overhead.

“Patience, my children, patience,” answered Father Fritz, with a smile. “We have in the Word of God a glorious promise that one day all the world shall be His,

and He will rule over it from end to end. We know not when that day will come, but we can leave it to Him ; ourselves, as humble instruments, seeking to do the tiny atoms of work with which He has entrusted us, and always leaving the result with Him. For if we seek to see results now, well might we bow our heads in despair."

When they took to the canoe again he questioned Swanalulu more closely as to the condition of his people, and the nature of the illness which seemed to be devastating them. From the replies received he gathered that it was a species of ague, and that probably its virulence might be partly attributed to the eager consumption of raw spirit which the hapless Indians bought from the fur-traders in exchange for their beaver skins, and which was becoming so terrible a curse through the country.

Father Fritz, as they went along, sometimes stopped the canoe and disembarked, walking through the forest and culling certain herbs he found growing there. He gave to the boys the leaves of some to chew, and told them that they possessed valuable medicinal properties, and that they were of great use in curing those attacked by the ague. The boys showed him some of the little phials which old Margaret had given them, and which they still carried in their wallets. Father Fritz tasted them, and pronounced them to be decoctions of herbs, which might some day be very useful.

At night, when they made their camp fire and sat

round it, he prepared a decoction of his own leaves, and stirred it patiently a great while, telling the boys meantime of the wonderful properties to be found in almost every plant and tree, and ever turning their thoughts with loving reverence and gratitude towards the Heavenly Father, whose goodness made such wonderful provision for His children, although they took of His good things so often without a thought of the Giver.

The brothers fell asleep at last beside the fire, with the vision before their eyes of the good father preparing his healing medicine, and talking earnestly to the Indian, who squatted beside him, and seemed to hang upon his words with reverence and keen attention.

Gaspard was the first to wake. His eyes opened upon a strange and wonderful scene. Day was dawning—the wonderful dawn of the forest. The east was all in a fervid glow of palpitating light. Between the solemn pines, with their heavy drooping wealth of dark-green needles, the sun rose like a ball of lambent fire, darting long shafts of burning flame through the illimitable rows of sentinel trees. Below them the great river slipped along through its wood-crowned banks, a glossy, transparent, green colour, save where the sunlight touched it in the widening reaches and dimpled it with spots of gold.

Suddenly the life of the forest began to awaken. Strange bird-calls were echoed from tree to tree, here and there a songster broke into a sudden flood of melody. Another day had dawned in this trackless

wild, and nature was bidding it welcome, though the eye of civilized man had seldom penetrated these wilds to rejoice in the wondrous beauty of the Canadian dawn.

Soon all the party were astir, and the canoe was loaded and launched on the bosom of the still sleeping river. But not for long were they able to pursue their way along the watery road, for flecks of foam were already dotting the water, and a sullen booming roar broke gradually upon their ears.

“What is it?” asked Gaspard, looking along the river, and then turning his eyes upon the face of Swanalulu.

“It is the voice of the great water-spirit,” answered the Indian—“the spirit who lives in the underground caverns of the river, and whose voice is heard for miles.” Then he suddenly paused, glanced at Father Fritz, and added: “But doubtless the Great Spirit of the white men is greater than he, and will preserve us, even if we make not the offering to the spirit of the waters.”

In truth, it was the cataract of the Chaudière that they were approaching, and which soon shone snow-white before them, right across their path. A glorious and beautiful sight in the sunlight—sheets of spray bursting out like puffs of smoke from a cannon’s mouth, and the whole torrent encircled by the shifting glories of the ever-changing rainbows hanging in the quivering air.

The sight was so glorious that the canoe was taken up as near to the fall as was possible, and the travellers

remained silently watching the wonderful scene till Swanalulu drove his bark to the shore, and dragged it forth to convey it once more upon his shoulders to quieter waters above.

But the travellers still stood fascinated by the wonderful beauty of the scene. Father Fritz broke suddenly into speech.

“Think of it, boys! All these thousands of years from the creation that water has been falling in sheets of foam; those glorious rainbow tints—like unto the rainbow encircling the throne of God—have been lighting up this wilderness, and only God Almighty to look down upon its wild beauty. Is it not wonderful to think of? That He should have made all this beauty, without any human eye to revel in it. Surely He must Himself love this earth, and regard it with fatherly tenderness and pride! And think of the glories which He will reveal to us when He shall make all things new, and when His kingdom shall be set up for ever!”

But ere the boys could frame any answer the quick eyes of the Indian had espied something, and with a sudden gesture of caution he threw himself down upon the grass, and motioned to his companions to do the same. They obeyed, thinking at the first that he had seen some wild beast approaching; but almost immediately perceived that it was some Indians in a canoe, coming as near to the head of the fall as it was safe to approach. A naked savage stood in the prow of the canoe making wild, fierce gestures, and suddenly he

flung something into the boiling water, whilst immediately his companions turned their paddles and made rapidly for the shore.

“What did he do?” asked Claude, wonderingly.

“Threw in tobacco,” answered Swanalulu. “It is what our people always do—to make an offering to the spirit of the waters for a safe voyage. I would have done the same myself, but that Father Fritz has taught me that there is only one God, and that He is the Great Spirit to which all the rest are subject.”

Gaspard would have asked more of this custom, but a sudden sound smote upon their ears and distracted their attention.

It was like the sound of fighting. Wild cries arose upon the stillness of the air—cries of rage and pain and terror, and the Indian war-whoop, which always meant battle.

Swanalulu seemed instantly to understand.

“Some Iroquois have been lying in wait!” he cried, springing to his feet. “They wait for our canoes here at the falls, and if we give our offering to the spirit of the water, they think our canoes are laden with furs, and they fall upon us and slay and rob us. Let me go to the aid of my brethren. Let me strike a blow for them, else will they be murdered by our foes, and their goods will be spoiled.”

“We will go with thee! We will help thee!” cried the boys, who, well armed and full of generous impulse, were eager to help the weak against the strong.

Swanalulu, with a yell and a whoop which sounded terrible even in the ears of his comrades, sprang forward towards the place whence the sounds of warfare issued, and the two lads were after him in a second. In three more they had reached the spot where a fierce fight was being waged by about a dozen naked Indians, all struggling together with their savage weapons uplifted, and rending the air with their cries. But without the guidance of Swanalulu the boys would not have known friend from foe, and would have feared to join the conflict. As it was, Swanalulu indicated to them whom to attack, and they fell with right good will upon a pair of swarthy savages, whose faces were painted in a hideous manner, and who were dancing and yelling in so ferocious a manner that they could not hear the approach of these new foes.

In a few minutes, however, the Iroquois saw that they were outnumbered, and they fled to the forest with yells of rage and defeat. One of their number lay upon the ground, and the victors eagerly pounced upon him, bound him hand and foot, and conveyed him to their canoe.

“They will torture him to death to-night!” said Swanalulu to his companions, with a certain satisfaction in his tone; but the lads looked appealingly at Father Fritz, whose face had grown grave and almost stern.

“We will see about that,” he said briefly, and the next minute they were all surrounded by the eager and curious Indians, who had heard from Swanalulu that

these white men were coming as visitors to their tribe, and who were filled at once with the most lively curiosity and pleasure.

When they found that Father Fritz could speak to them in their own language they were more delighted than ever, and soon brought from their canoe a present of beaver skins, which they begged of him to accept. He answered them that he came not as a trader, but to bring them some good news, and gently put aside their gifts, telling them that he would rather they kept them for their own use.

This was strange teaching to such a people, but Father Fritz had a gentle and conciliatory way with him that won affection and confidence, and for the rest of their voyage along the upper Ottawa the party was attended by this new contingent, who altered the course of their canoe, and decided to return to their village, escorting the white visitors with them.

It was certainly a wonderful journey for the boys. The falls of the Chat, with their sixteen cataracts, filled them with astonishment and admiration one day; upon another, they came across the path of a forest tornado, and saw huge trees levelled to the ground like matchwood, and caught glimpses of the glistening eyes of the wild cat as it peered at them through the branches and then dashed headlong away. The natives caught wild duck for them to eat, and prepared it native fashion, and they fraternized with these dusky creatures, grew familiar with their language, and insisted (to the surprise and

disgust of their friends) in making advances to the sullen Iroquois prisoner, in giving him food and dressing his wounds, and getting him to speak to them in his tongue.

However, the white men were regarded as benignant spirits who might do what they would, and after a few days of travel the Algonquin Indians, with great show of triumph and joy, marched them into the little clearing which they had made by the edge of Muskrat Lake, and where they had erected a rude settlement for themselves, which they dignified by the name of a town.

But it had been a bad season for the Indians here. Not only had their adventurous enemies the Iroquois made frequent raids upon them, but they had been attacked by the malady of which Swanalulu had spoken, and many had died, whilst others had been terribly ill, and were even now only able to crawl about in a feeble fashion.

The village was a strange place. It consisted of rows of bark huts or wigwams, the largest of these being in the centre and reserved for the chief. Blackened stumps of trees encumbered the ground, the people having been too idle to do more than burn down the trees to effect the clearing, leaving the charred stumps standing grimly all round.

The chief, having been warned of their approach, came out to greet the strangers, bearing the calumet, or peace-pipe, in his hand, and he and Father Fritz exchanged friendly words, after which the three white

men were conducted into his hut, and a feast spread before them.

It was not a very sumptuous refection certainly, but the boys were wonderfully entertained to see the various queer dishes brought in by the wild-looking squaws and presented to them with solemn ceremony. They did not find the cooking bad, and ate as much as they could; rings of curious Indians standing round them all the while, sometimes daring to advance and touch them or their clothes or their weapons, and then moving off again, grinning and chattering like so many monkeys.

Father Fritz meantime talked with the chief, and having heard of the sad condition of the sick, he told them that he would see if he could in any wise help them. First he bade the chief assemble the people together, whilst he addressed himself to them. He told them very simply that he himself could do nothing, but that he served the great God of heaven and earth—the Great Spirit, as they called Him, and that He could do everything, and loved all His creatures, even though they knew nothing of Him. After seeking to make his hearers understand something of the nature of prayer, he bade them all kneel down, and then prayed for a blessing upon the means he was about to use.

This being done—greatly to the edification of the Indians, who were impressed by the little ceremony as well as by Father Fritz's manner—he took his herbs and preparations and went amongst the sick, giving to each what he judged best, and adding a few words of cheer

and blessing. Afterwards they all retired to the wigwam which Swanalulu had prepared for their accommodation, and which they found lined with beaver skins and almost luxurious in its accommodation, and passed a night of sound sleep in the heart of this strange Indian village.

In the morning they were greeted by the news that the patients were much better. The man who had appeared to be dying yesterday was sitting up and eating to-day. The village was in a state of excitement and joy because the chief had declared that the Iroquois prisoner should be done to death at the stake to-day in sight of all the people, and already the drums were being beaten to assemble the community to witness his agonies in the fire.

“Father Fritz, Father Fritz! you won’t let them!” cried Claude, rushing up to the father in a state of great excitement; and Father Fritz came out of the tent, bare-headed and with a strange look upon his face, and placed himself beside the stake which was being set up in the midst of the village.

The Indians looked wonderingly at him; but he spoke no word until all were assembled around the stake, whither the captive was being led, bound with thongs, and wearing a look of mingled defiance and baffled fury upon his face.

Then the father stretched out his hand and laid it upon the shoulder of the captive.

“This man belongs to the great God of heaven and

earth, of whom I told you but yesterday. He made him, He loves him; if you put him to this death in cold blood you will provoke the sorrow and anger of Him whom you yesterday desired to serve. We have bent our knees in prayer to Him to spare and save your sick. If you disobey His laws in cruelly slaying this His servant, how can you ask His blessing? My children, what the Lord pardons in your ignorance, He will not pardon to men who have been told that it is against His will. You are His servants; you may become His children. He has made you all, even as He has made this enemy. Do His will, and He will abundantly bless you. Turn your back upon His commandments, and He will be forced (though with pain and grief) to turn His back upon you. For He does not compel obedience—He asks it of all, and He abundantly blesses all who yield it to him.”

Not once, not twice, but many, many times, and in varying words did the father impress his teaching upon the astonished ears of the Indians. So strange did this gospel sound that it was long ere they could grasp even the most elementary of its truths. But they loved the speaker. They could not help it. His perfect fearlessness impressed them with the idea that he bore a charmed life and came with a divine message; his reluctance to accept gifts seemed to indicate miraculous ways of possessing himself of riches; whilst his tender gentleness of manner and address touched what was soft and human in their hearts. They did not want to

offend this man. They wanted to keep him amongst them, and so the prisoner was taken away by the chief's command, and upon the next day was actually released and permitted to make for his native solitudes unharmed.

For several weeks did the travellers remain in the Algonquin village. The sick recovered, partly through the action of the remedies and partly from the better attendance they received through the instructions of Father Fritz and the two lads, who both interested themselves greatly in the welfare of the village. They taught the Indians how to build better huts, and how to clear and till their plots of ground. They learned from them many clever ways of snaring and hunting the wild creatures of the wood, and lived a free and happy life of adventure, whilst the father gave teachings and earnest exhortations to the people, and brought into their darkened lives some of the first faint glimmerings of Christianity.

But time passed on with wonderful rapidity, and the snows of winter began to fall. The boys quickly learned the art of skimming along upon snow-shoes, and found the progress a delightful one. Father Fritz had learned it in past years, and could rival even the active boys in feats of strength and endurance. The time came when they must say adieu to the friendly natives, and begin their journey by land—for they decided upon that as the easier method of transit, now that the snow and ice were blocking the water-

ways—to Fort Frontenac, to join the rest of the party there, and carry their crusade to other Indian settlements.

The friendly Indians looked very serious as they heard something of the plan sketched out by La Salle. They feared it would end in death and disaster to all concerned. They said that the great river was haunted by terrible demons as well as by hostile tribes; that it changed its course from season to season, and that the perils were more than mortal man could contend with. All this was but the tradition and legendary lore of the Indian tribes, who implored their friends not to adventure themselves on such a terrible enterprise, and would gladly have kept them always with them, except for the resolve they all had to keep to their plan, and meet their fellow-countrymen at the appointed place.

But the father promised that this Indian settlement should not be forgotten. Wherever there were baptized Indians confessing their faith in Christ, there the hardy friars and priests penetrated as occasion served, to keep them in mind of their profession, and teach them more and more of the true faith. The chief and his household were baptized by Father Fritz before he left, together with a number more of the Indians, and they promised to go from time to time to Montreal or to the little colony at Fort Frontenac to attend service and visit the fathers there. Their names were enrolled in a book carried by Father Fritz, and would be reported to the

friars at Fort Frontenac, of which there were several. These neophytes should not be forgotten.

Indeed, the chief and some of his picked warriors resolved to escort the party to Fort Frontenac, and right glad were the travellers of their company. The faithful Swanalulu had attached himself to them permanently, and was only eager to be their servant for life.

It was a wonderful and mysterious journey, through the fairy forest land, and over plains of trackless snow. The boys were enchanted, and particularly so when the track of a bear gave them the keen excitement of a hunt, and an excellent supper at the day's end.

They were hardly ready for the close of these pleasant hunting days, when at last the buildings of Fort Frontenac rose up before them. But the hearty welcome they received from the hospitable friars went far to satisfy them, and they also heard news of the expedition, which drove all other matters from their minds.

Two parties had already passed Fort Frontenac, and gone onwards up the Lake of Ontario towards the river and majestic fall of Niagara, where it was said that La Salle was about to build, at the head of the fall, a ship which should give him the command of all the upper waters and lakes of that vast continent.

Father Hennepin, together with La Salle's second-lieutenant, La Motte, had been the first to reach the fort and pass onwards to Niagara. La Salle himself, with Tonty and the bulk of his men, had passed a little later. The friars reported that the attitude of the Indians was

hostile, that they were very jealous of this new plan, and that they feared misfortunes would follow from the fact that La Salle's followers were themselves becoming disheartened, and that there were dissensions and strifes among them.

All these things the travellers eagerly listened to during the days they were forced to remain at Fort Frontenac. It was the Christmas season for one thing, and the hospitable friars were resolved to keep them over that festal tide; and Father Fritz was anxious that his newly-baptized converts should be brought into touch with their future pastors and priests, and attend the religious ceremonies of the season. In addition to this, the lake was lashed with a series of hurricanes so severe that any attempt to launch a canoe upon it would end in disaster and death to all concerned. They must therefore be content to remain for the present where they were, and await a favourable moment for the passage of the stormy lake, and a junction with the rest of their party.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "GRIFFIN."

"JULES! Is it thou? Oh, it is good to see thy face again!"

"Gaspard! Claude! Why, lads, I should scarce have known ye! Ye be grown into veritable men! Ah, how I have been waiting and watching for you. Methought some hurt must surely have befallen you. But here you are, safe and sound at last!"

"Yes; and Father Fritz too. He has come with us. We have been with him all the time. But so many things conspired to hinder us, and the friars at Fort Frontenac begged us so hard to stay. The Sieur de la Salle arrived there but ten days ere we left, worn and wan and half starved."

"Ah! Then he has arrived safely?" questioned Jules, eagerly. "We were sore afraid of the perilous journey for him, over untrodden snow-fields, trackless forests haunted by fierce Iroquois, and the treacherous ice of the lake. He arrived safe, say you?"

"Yes; but worn out and almost starved, for their food had failed two days before they reached the fort.

Why did he leave the camp here? He seemed full of anxious cares when he arrived, but we understood not well the matter in hand."

"Matter enough, in truth. We are sore beset here, and have had all manner of disaster. We brought up provisions in our little vessel, and the wherewithal to build a fine vessel at the head of the fall, of which ye shall hear more anon; but when we had landed, and had come up hither to set about making blockhouses and shelters for ourselves, hard by the spot chosen as our shipyard, the dolt of a pilot left in charge of the vessel below loosed her from her moorings, in direct defiance of the commands laid upon him, and she was dashed in pieces and wrecked ere we heard a word of his treachery or folly."

"And all stores lost?"

"Almost all, and, what was worse, the bulk of the stores and materials for the building of the vessel. We have been sore pressed for food, and have been hindered and balked at every turn. It is to gather together fresh provisions for the further journey and the needful plenishings for the ship that our commander has gone to Fort Frontenac. Heaven speed him on his mission, and bring him safely back to us again!"

"And in his absence who is master here?" asked Gaspard. "We heard at Fort Frontenac that Father Hennepin had gone forward to Niagara."

"Yes, he is here, and works valiantly at any task; but the *Sieur de la Tonty* is commander now. We

love him well, for he has ever a kind word for all around him, and never looks black and careworn as the commander does. Yet, in truth, there is plenty to give him sorrow and care; for we have enemies abroad who are seeking to stir up the enmity and jealousy of the Indians, and there have been times when we have had fears for our very lives."

Jules then proceeded to relate to his eager brothers a few details as to the Indian policy and method of procedure. Left to themselves, it is possible that the wild denizens of the woods would have cared but little for the doings of the white men amongst them, the more so that they had hitherto been on friendly terms with the French settlers.

But this new and audacious scheme of La Salle's, and the colossal nature of the enterprise, was stirring up bitter jealousy and hostility in the minds of his own countrymen not concerned in it, and also of all traders of other nationalities, of whom there was a sprinkling in these parts of the country.

It was believed that if La Salle succeeded in his enterprise the other traders of Canada would all be ruined; and their anger and enmity were deeply stirred. They therefore sought to put every kind of hindrance in his way. Some believed that they had tampered with his pilot, and had caused the wreck of the vessel. It was certain that seeds of discontent and jealousy had been sown amongst his band; and, more serious than all this, there was a regular movement on foot to stir

up the jealous hostility of the Indians against the expedition, and to rouse in them those race hatreds against each other which formed the mainspring of their most ferocious deeds.

The neighbourhood of the chain of northern lakes was the home of the fierce Iroquois, who were divided into many tribes—such as Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, Mohawks, and so forth. But along the banks of the Mississippi and its tributary streams lay the home of the Illinois, also divided into various tribes; and between Iroquois and Illinois there lay a deep-rooted and bitter enmity and jealousy.

It was therefore an easy matter to stir up in the hearts of the Iroquois hostility to any project which was said to be for the prosperity and betterment of the tribes of the Illinois. The enemies of La Salle and his enterprise cunningly suggested these ideas to the fierce warriors of the Iroquois. They told them that their enemies would flourish and prosper, whilst they themselves dwindled and starved; that all the trade of the upper lakes would be diverted to another channel; and that these white men were only the friends of the river tribes, who would grow rich and fat in proportion as their rivals failed and died out. It was easy to play upon the irrational jealousy of Indians, to whom the doings of the white men were always more or less enveloped in mystery. Jules told all this to his brethren in few words, but added that, had it not been the hunting season of the Iroquois, when they were

scattered right and left throughout the forest regions, he did not think they would ever have been permitted to finish their work, or to remain unmolested in their huts.

As it was, they had been right glad when the vessel was forward enough to enable them to launch her on the water and to sleep on board; for an Indian squaw, to whom kindness had been shown, had warned them that her tribesmen had threatened to burn the vessel on the stocks, and the huts of the workers with their sleeping occupants inside; and a close watch and guard had to be kept up night and day, which had been a serious tax upon the strength and patience of the explorers.

The brothers had met just above the magnificent Falls of Niagara, and it was whilst the younger pair were gazing in amazement upon that majestic and wonderful sight that Jules had suddenly come upon them, on his way to the encampment below. Now, however, he turned back with them, delighting to have his brothers once more with him, eager to bring them to their father, and to show them the vessel, so well forward now as to look quite finished, and to afford a safe place of refuge for the whole small colony during the night.

Right glad was the father to see his sons again, and to hear the story of their adventures. Right glad were the boys to be now in the heart of the projected enterprise, having been so well seasoned by the past six

months of forest life that Gaspard looked a man in strength and size, and Claude was not far behind him.

By day they all worked with a will at the final finishing of the vessel, eagerly awaiting the return of the commander and the commencement of the voyage. His lieutenant, Tonty, was the cheeriest and bravest of men, working almost as deftly with one hand as others with two, superintending every detail, cheering all who began to fear for the result of the enterprise, and singing gay songs to the tired workmen when, at the close of the day, they gathered on deck for the evening meal.

But it was easy to see that harmony was far from prevailing amongst the men themselves, and that some of them were growing disheartened and discontented. Then, too, Father Hennepin was inclined to be jealous of Tonty, and to seek to draw away the men's allegiance from him. That bold friar had a good deal of worldly ambition intermingled with his ecclesiastical ardour, and there was often a considerable amount of friction between him and the lieutenant.

The gentle influence of Father Fritz, however, did much to preserve peace. He strove always to keep before the eyes of the party their dependence upon one another, and their duties one to the other; and whilst Father Hennepin contented himself by saying mass for all who would listen, in the little bark chapel which he had built upon shore, he was ready enough to let Father Fritz address the men when he could find any

to listen, and as many of this party were of the Protestant persuasion, and coldly regarded by the friar, the larger-hearted and more truly catholic priest could obtain a far greater influence over them.

Spring had merged into summer, however, before La Salle reappeared. The boys had been out hunting in the woods, and were returning laden with game of various sorts, when they were aware of a great excitement and commotion in the camp. Rushing forward to ascertain the cause, they found La Salle in the midst of a circle of excited countrymen, all shaking him by the hand, and eager to learn what news he brought—eager, also, to show him the vessel, of which they were justly proud; and for the moment all was goodwill and enthusiasm, and even the dark and melancholy La Salle unbent and was genial and complimentary to all.

Nevertheless he brought back tidings of a disquieting kind. His enemies in Quebec and Montreal were doing all that was possible to undermine his credit and to ruin his finances. It is true that he was in debt, for he had raised money in various ways in order to obtain funds for his cherished scheme. Now, taking advantage of his absence, his creditors had seized his goods and lands, and were making havoc of his private property; yet all the more was he bent on going forward and proving to the world that a great and mighty enterprise was to be accomplished by him.

The ship was indeed a source of pride and joy to

him. In compliment to Count Frontenac, his patron, the prow had been carved into the similitude of a gigantic griffin, and by that name the vessel was called. La Salle had brought with him a fair provision in stores and necessaries of various sorts. These had been left for the time being below the fall at the blockhouses there; but the whole party set to work now to drag them up to the heights, and an arduous task they found it. But they worked with a will, and in a few days all was transported to the vessel and safely stowed.

La Salle had also brought with him two more Récollet friars, Father Zenobe Membré and Father Gabriel Ribourde, who were eager for the conversion of the Indians, and the founding of the true faith in the untrodden lands whither they were bent. The fathers all lent aid to the men during their labours, and assisted with their own hand in bearing the burdens along the rough and steep road. For the time being all was harmony and goodwill, and the sanguine Tonty expressed a hope that their troubles were fading away at last.

Gaspard and Claude presented themselves before the commander, and craved permission to be of the exploring party. The dark eyes of La Salle lighted with approval as he took stock of Gaspard's fine proportions, and heard the eager protestations of both boys. His eyes fell upon the father, standing a little apart. He had come to regard Dautray and his son as amongst

his most loyal and trusted followers. Indeed all the Dautrays had given him the greatest satisfaction.

"With all my heart, boys; with all my heart!" he said. "It is of such as you that I would fain make up my company. Stout hearts and loyal spirits can alone carry us through all that lies before us. If your hearts are in this thing, come, and welcome. I have heard from M. de Tonty of the use you have been to him in my absence, and from Father Fritz of your hardihood and endurance."

The boys glowed with pleasure, made their bow, and retired. Their hearts were beating high with excitement and pleasure. Even the lips of the silent Jules seemed to be opened at last, and the three brothers, with their cousin Louis, sat far into the night looking down into the flowing waters below them, and planning all that they would dare and do when the moment for action should have come.

The morrow dawned fair and bright and clear—a glorious August morning, the seventh of the month. At the first flush of dawn the camp was astir; the willing band were jostling and hustling in eager desire to get all in order by the time the commander should appear. Tow ropes were attached to the vessel, and ready volunteers pressed forward, clamouring for the honour of towing her up stream to the lake above. Her sails were set to catch the favouring breeze, and as La Salle appeared on deck with Tonty at his side, a great cheer arose from the throats of the whole party,

followed almost immediately by the strong voices of the four fathers, all raised in chanting the solemn words of the "Te Deum." Instantly every head was bared, and the men took up the solemn and soul-stirring strain. As the last words were sung, the anchor was heaved up, and the vessel glided with swan-like motion from its moorings along the glassy current of the upper Niagara.

As she left her moorings she boomed forth a salute from her cannon, and the gaping Indians lining the bank of the river leaped high into the air in astonishment, yelping like dogs in admiration and fear.

Swanalulu was of the party, and so were a few other Indians, two of them being Mohegan hunters, who had already attached themselves to La Salle's party, and done excellent service in supplying it with game during the inclement winter weather. The whole party was in high spirits; the sun shone down cheerily, and rapid progress was made owing to the favouring condition of the wind.

Runners in advance came hurrying back presently to announce that the blue waters of Lake Erie were in sight, and with another cheer of triumph the vessel for a brief while was arrested in its course whilst all those who had assisted to tow it along the upper river embarked. Then with a swan-like motion the little craft bounded forward again, and in another half-hour had shot out upon the virgin water of Lake Erie, where never sail had been seen before.

Again the strains of the "Te Deum" burst forth, and

the happy explorers felt that a voyage so auspiciously begun could not but continue happily to the end.

Father Fritz moved thoughtfully to and fro on deck, and Claude and Gaspard gravitated towards him naturally.

"Is it not glorious? Is it not beautiful, my father?" they asked. "Surely God is giving us His blessing! Surely He will be with us to the end!"

"Truly He will, my children; never doubt that," was the ready answer. "But we must learn to feel and know Him close beside us in storm and in tempest, in hunger and peril, as well as in sunshine and success. So alone can we truly know Him for the Unchangeable Father. We must learn to see beauty in all things, and to find contentment in His love, whether He lay upon us a chastening hand, or give us pleasure to drink as out of a river."

And the boys, who had learned much, and were always learning, from Father Fritz, laid this lesson to heart, and strove to act upon it in days to come, when the clouds had gathered round them, and the sun of success seemed shrouded for ever.

For three days the brave little *Griffin* skimmed over the blue waters of the lake, and, having reached the western extremity, turned up the strait of Detroit, and crossed the Lake of St. Claire till the shining waters of Lake Huron unrolled themselves before their eyes.

All through the strait, game had been abundant. The hunters and some of the party, including the Dautray

boys, had landed and had fine times chasing the quarry through the woods and over the borders of the prairies. Bears were found, which were so timid as to fall an easy prey, and whose flesh was pronounced excellent. The vessel was well laden with provision when at last she shot out into Lake Huron.

But soon the clouds gathered ominously overhead. First came a long sullen peal of thunder, and then a gale of wind sprang up and lashed the water into a boiling foam. The planks of the *Griffin* strained and creaked. The men who were unskilled in seamanship hid themselves below decks, and cried helplessly upon their patron saints. The good fathers lost courage, and gave themselves up for lost, all save Father Fritz, who walked calmly to and fro, encouraging those who were seeking to manage and guide the ship, and trying to inspire resignation and courage amongst those lying in deadly fear of death.

The pilot was cursing aloud, vituperating La Salle for having taken him away from the brave salt ocean to drown him on a miserable fresh-water lake; and even La Salle, though in no wise daunted, gave up for a while all hope of saving themselves, and stood with his hand on Tonty's shoulder, prepared to die bravely at his post.

At the height of the storm Father Fritz stood in the midst of the quaking crew, and a strange light seemed to shine from his face. Suddenly he uplifted his voice and cried aloud,—

“O Lord Jesus Christ, who in Thine own Person didst still the tempest at the earnest cry of Thy terrified disciples; Thou who hast promised that Thou wilt hear prayer, and wilt give unto those who ask in faith that which they shall agree together to desire at Thy hand: Here we present ourselves before Thee in all our weakness and our peril, knowing that Thou canst hear, and that Thou alone canst save. Hear us, then, we beseech Thee, who come to Thee trusting in nothing but Thine own gracious promise. We take Thee at Thy word, Lord. We pray of Thee to allay this storm, and to succour and save us, and we doubt not that Thou wilt do it for Thine own Name’s sake—because Thine eternal word can never fail. We commend ourselves to Thee now and always, and pray Thy blessing upon us. Amen.”

Those who looked upon the father’s face, afterwards declared that it shone like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount. Hardly had the prayer been uttered before, with another violent peal of thunder, the wind, which had so suddenly sprung up, died down almost as suddenly. The sun shone out; the *Griffin* sped along over the tumbling waves, no longer staggering and reeling in peril of foundering. The frightened men came crowding up once more, crying, “A miracle! a miracle!” and gathering round Father Fritz; but he looked at them with his calm blue eyes, and answered,—

“Nay, my children, is it a miracle that we take the

Lord at His own word, and that he fulfils His own promise? Shame upon us if we trust His word so little that the fulfilling of it seems a miracle in our eyes."

After that the *Griffin* sped upon her way without further disaster, and reached the head of the lake, where stood the settlement of Michili Mackinac—a small colony of Jesuits and traders, their buildings enclosed in palisades, whilst clustering around lay the Huron village, and at a little distance an Ottawa village with its wigwams and bark huts.

Disquieting news reached them at Michili Mackinac. Although the Indians swarmed out in their canoes to see the *Griffin*, and expressed the liveliest interest and fear when she fired her salute, and although the Jesuits gave the party an ostensibly friendly welcome, it was plain that deep suspicion and jealousy had taken root even in this far-off place. La Salle had sent men on in advance in the summer to trade with the natives and lay up supplies against his arrival; but these men had been tampered with, and had nearly all proved faithless, whilst they had betrayed the nature of the enterprise to the settlers, and filled them with jealous fears.

It soon became evident that it was useless to linger here for the return of the faithless messengers. Indeed they had already stayed too long, for the Jesuits had tampered with La Salle's men, and had tried hard to sow the seeds of disunion and discontent amongst them. With loyal spirits such as the Dautrays their insidious attempts were useless and abortive; but they succeeded

only too well in other cases, and it was with heavy hearts that the brothers saw the change coming over the faces and manners of their comrades.

"They will desert us in stress of peril," said Gaspard, with a flush of indignation on his face. "They will turn traitor to our commander, and perchance ruin his enterprise. I would that he would sift amongst us even as Gideon did, and send away all who are faint-hearted, for I like not the looks that these men bend upon our commander, nor the way in which they mutter and murmur amongst themselves! Ill will come of it one of these days—I am sure of it."

Whether or not La Salle and Tonty knew all the harm that was being done amongst the crew, they at least saw that it was useless to linger longer here, so took ship and passed into Lake Michigan, where, after sailing for some days, a luckless piece of good luck befell them.

As they approached a settlement of Indians, a number of canoes darted out from shore to greet them, and an old chief of the Pottawatamie tribe came on board, and told them that he was a devoted servant of the great Onontio (which is the Indian name of the governor of Canada), and that he had a great store of beaver skins laid up for them on shore. So the *Griffin* was turned to land, and a great feast was made amongst the Pottawatamies, the men danced and capered and sang all night, and their visitors sat on heaps of beaver skins, and were served with dishes of curious flavour

by kneeling squaws; whilst La Salle talked with the chief of his journey, and received piles upon piles of skins, which if sold at a good market would go far to set him up in funds again—a thing of no small moment to the expedition.

"But of what use is this cargo of skins to a party of explorers?" questioned Gaspard of Father Fritz, as he saw the canoes of the Indians plying backwards and forwards with their loads of furs, bearing them on board the *Griffin*, where La Salle stood directing the storage. They noted too that the return canoes bore loads of provisions from the larger vessel, and this greatly surprised many who stood by.

The face of Father Fritz was grave as he replied to the questions of the Dautrays, who stood in a group around him.

"The commander has resolved to send back the vessel to the colony upon the Niagara River, under the charge of the pilot and crew, to deposit this cargo of furs for transport to Fort Frontenac and Quebec. He purposes to prosecute the voyage for a while in canoes, and on reaching the head of the lake nearest to the territory of the Illinois, to wait there for the return of the *Griffin* with fresh supplies, meantime building a fort upon the mouth of a river of which he has heard, which will serve for a base of future operations and a place of safety."

The listeners heard this news in dismay.

"Trust the *Griffin* to the treacherous pilot who

wrecked the other ship!" they exclaimed. "Ah, but that is madness! And already the men are disheartened and half mutinous! What will they say when they hear that the vessel is going back, and that they must trust to frail canoes for the remainder of the voyage?"

Father Fritz shook his head gravely. He had himself remonstrated with La Salle upon this sudden resolve, but without avail. Tonty, who alone had power to influence him, was absent, having been dispatched by La Salle himself to seek for some of the treacherous messengers of whom mention has already been made, and he was to join the rest of the party at the head of the lake, travelling himself by land. The friars shook their heads, the men grumbled, but no one had power to bend the iron will of La Salle.

The canoes obtained by barter from the Indians were heavily loaded with tools, a forge under the charge of the brothers Dautray, merchandise and provisions, but the faces of many of the men were dark and lowering.

Gaspard and Claude watched with a heavy heart as the *Griffin* spread her white sails, and, after firing a parting shot, began to skim gracefully along the water.

"Poor, beautiful *Griffin!*" cried Claude. "Good-bye, good-bye. My heart tells me that we shall never see thee again!"

Gaspard drew his brother a little aside, for there were many standing near to watch the departure of the vessel.

"Claude," he said, "I have a great fear that ill is

meant to our commander by some amongst our own party. Before Jules went away with M. de Tonty, he bade me keep a sharp eye upon yon black-browed fellow Duplessis. He told me he was certain that he meant mischief. And to-day I have watched his face, and when he heard himself named as one to remain with the canoes, such a look of hate and malice came into his eyes as I shall not soon forget. We must be watchful, brother; we must keep an eye on that evil man. For methinks he has a heart full of bitterness and treachery, and of hatred towards our commander."

Indeed it was no easy matter to keep the party in anything like cheerful spirits at this juncture. The men resented the departure of the *Griffin*. La Salle, in the absence of his cheerful, kindly lieutenant, was grave and sombre, and unwontedly imperative in his commands. The weather changed, and fierce storms of wind and rain lashed the waters continuously. The canoes were often half-swamped, and had to be driven ashore, and sometimes to be dragged along with their heavy burdens for considerable distances. Provisions ran short at times, and there were perils from Indians which required a constant watchfulness from all the party. La Salle was far more successful in dealing with his dusky enemies than with his own followers. His commanding way and fearless look subdued the Indians quickly, the more so as he was always kindly and friendly when possible. But his curt commands and taciturn gravity were uncongenial to his followers, and

though some, like the Daustrays, admired and revered him for his dauntless courage and immense genius, others looked more and more gloomily upon him, and murmured openly against the hardships his resolve had entailed upon them.

Little as La Salle knew it, the lads Gaspard and Claude kept an almost constant watch upon him both by night and day. Their brother Jules, whose silent nature had seemed to find kinship with that of the taciturn commander, had enjoined them to this watchfulness, and they were resolved to exercise it unceasingly.

It was towards the close of a long and most trying day. The ice upon the lake had thickened much, and threatened to close altogether upon the canoes, so that the order had been given to drag them out and pull them along the thick crust of ice which fringed the margin of the lake, and where alone safe foothold could be had. The wearied and hungry men had petitioned to bivouac for the night and obtain a good rest, but La Salle with characteristic energy had resolved to push on a few leagues before calling a halt.

The men sullenly obeyed, and Father Fritz, together with the three friars, did his best to cheer and help them. Indeed Father Fritz was wont to load himself too heavily, so that he was sometimes exhausted at night, and hardly fit for the toils of the succeeding day. But though his kind and encouraging words did much to cheer some of the men, there were others

who shut their ears, and brooded angrily in their hearts.

At last the halt was called, fires were lighted, the scanty supper devoured with the ravenous hunger of famine, and then the party lay down to sleep. Claude's weary eyes closed almost the moment he had laid down his head. He knew not how long a time had elapsed before he heard a whisper in his ear,—

"Hist, Claude! hist! Wake up!—what is that sound?"

The habit of watchfulness was strong upon the boy in his weariness and semi-sleep. In a moment his eyes were wide open, his ears eagerly attent. He and Gaspard were lying side by side; it was his brother's voice which had aroused him.

All around lay the sleeping forms of their companions. At the outer edge of the camp stood the rude wigwam of bark which the Mohegan hunter was wont to build with wonderful celerity for La Salle's occupation at night, and which one of the fathers generally shared with him. To-night he had prevailed upon Father Fritz to be his companion, and it was well known that, unless the commander set himself to watch against Indians, he was wont to sleep the profound sleep of a practised traveller. Father Fritz also slept the peaceful, dreamless sleep of a mind at peace with God and man. Within that little shelter no watchful eye would be on the alert.

What was it Gaspard had heard? Claude turned a

questioning eye upon him without moving hand or foot. Was it Indians, or some wild beast prowling, or what?

"Hush!" said Gaspard, scarce breathing the word. "Watch and listen! I am sure some one is astir!"

Lying side by side, yet scarce drawing breath, the brothers waited and watched. When at last a stealthy movement was heard in the camp, they could hardly restrain a start. Deep darkness reigned in the forest around them, but the camp fires shed a ruddy glow about the sleeping figures. One of these figures was slowly and very cautiously moving—working along the ground in snake-like fashion, and casting quick and malevolent glances around upon the recumbent figures lying beside the fires. The flickering flames fell upon his face as he moved, and revealed the sinister features and evil eyes of the man Duplessis.

Silently and cautiously he worked his way along the ground in the direction of the little bark wigwam where the commander lay. He did not appear to be armed, but there was so evil a look upon his face that the brothers exchanged meaning glances in certainty of intended evil.

"Be cautious, be careful; let him not see us," whispered Gaspard; "but when he is a little farther off let us slip behind this tree, and so make a circuit, and come nigh the place ere he can have done his wicked will."

The boys had learned from Swanalulu to creep along the ground in veritable Indian fashion. When the face of their enemy was turned the other way they crept

from the ring of sleepers, and were immediately outside the ring of firelight. Then rising to their feet they ran lightly in a circle round the camp under the shadow of the protecting firs, and came to the place where the wigwam stood.

No sound issued from thence; all seemed still and peaceful; but a sudden pungent smell assaulted Gaspard's keen nostrils, and he cried in a suppressed voice,—

"The fiend! he has set fire to the place. He would stifle them in their sleep!"

It was even so. As the boys dashed in, flinging the frail bark right and left, they were only just in time to save the occupants from a terrible death. The blankets in which they were wrapped had already caught fire. A few moments, and all would have been over; for the stifling fumes of the burning bark had deadened the faculties of the sleepers, and would have rendered them an easy prey.

But the shouts of the boys awoke them, and instantly La Salle was on his feet, fighting his way out, whilst Gaspard helped Father Fritz to rise, and pressed out with his hands the flames that were smouldering around him. The whole camp was astir at once, and many were the exclamations of dismay and surprise at the terrible nature of the "accident," as all supposed it, which had so nearly had a tragic termination.

The lads said nothing as to what they knew or suspected, and it did not appear as though Duplessis was aware of their prompt interference being due to

anything but a sudden awakening at the smell of the smoke.

When Gaspard whispered in Father Fritz's ear the true story, it was gravely listened to, but when asked if the story should be told to the commander, the father answered thoughtfully,—

"I think not. We will strive to have patience and mercy. I will speak to this poor creature myself, and see if I cannot work upon his better nature, and drive out this demon of hatred. We must learn to love our enemies, and to forgive those who do us evil. You were right to speak to me of this, my son; but let it go no further. God may even yet will that he should be plucked as a brand from the burning."

CHAPTER IX.

WITH THE INDIANS.

“GASPARD ! Gaspard ! Indians ! Indians !”

Claude was white and breathless as he rushed back into the camp with these warning words upon his lips.

Gaspard sprang to his feet in eager excitement, and both he and Jules dashed forward to meet the returning Claude, half expecting to see him pursued by a host of dusky denizens of the woods.

“Where, Claude ? Where ?” they cried.

“Over yonder, a mile away, there is an Indian village. Swanalulu saw it first as we tracked a deer. He bade me come and look and take word back to the commander. He is watching still. He says they are Illinois—a hunting party : perhaps the people who belong to the town from which we took the corn a month ago. Will they be angry ? Will they be our enemies ? They are camped in wigwams on both sides of the river. There are many of them, but how many I cannot tell.”

“We must tell the commander,” said Jules at once, and Gaspard, at a sign from him, went off with the news : for

the bright-eyed lad, so full of courage, loyalty, and endurance, had won his way to favourable notice from La Salle, especially since that occurrence, now many months old, when the promptitude of Gaspard and Claude had saved him from the peril of a fiery death.

Many and great had been the hardships through which this band of pioneers had passed since they had parted from the *Griffin*, of which no tidings had been received, and which had never rejoined them at the southern extremity of Lake Michigan as agreed. Tonty had, after many perils, succeeded in reaching his party, and a fort had been built at the mouth of the river of St. Joseph, in the country of the Miamis, which was called Fort Miamis, and which had sheltered the party during the most inclement portion of the bitter winter.

With the first melting of the ice they had started once again to seek for the source of the Kankakee, which they knew to be a tributary of the Illinois, which in turn emptied itself into the mighty waters of the Mississippi. They had found this river at last, so narrow when first they reached it, that a man could stride across, but widening into a large stream as it ran its course, and now they were floating down the greater waters of the Illinois, and had passed the lake-like widening of that river, then called Pimitoui, and now Peoria Lake.

Often they had been sorely beset for food, and the utmost endeavours of the Indian hunters had only just saved the party from starvation. They had seen almost nothing of the Indians all this while, it being the winter

hunting season, when the tribes left their towns and villages and scattered about the forests in search of game. Once in their greatest extremity they had found a silent and deserted Illinois town without a single living inhabitant, and guided by their Indian followers, they had discovered a great store of corn laid up by the tribe after the autumn harvest, to last till the grain again ripened. To touch these corn stores was a dire offence in the eyes of Indians ; but necessity knows no law, and the party helped themselves to a certain number of measures, resolving to seek to propitiate the tribe, if ever they should come across its members, by ample gifts in repayment.

But naturally this incident, which might already have reached the ears of the natives, made them somewhat anxious as to their next encounter with the denizens of the forest. Their little party of some two score against the whole of the innumerable tribe of the Illinois ! It was indeed a fearful thing to contemplate ; but the hardy and adventurous pioneers never permitted craven fears to overcome them. Hitherto their dealings with the Indians had been amicable. Why not take courage and hope for the future ?

In a few minutes from the time when the news was brought in that there were Indians in the vicinity, all the camp was astir, and Claude was called upon to tell his tale to a whole ring of eager listeners. La Salle's face was grave and determined ; that of Tonty full of eagerness and excitement. The men were divided in

feeling—some glad at any price to find signs of life in this immense wilderness, others somewhat apprehensive of the result of the encounter, and half desirous to turn back.

These, however, were quite in the minority, and it was only the faint-hearted and unfaithful members of the party who even dreamed of such a thing. Father Fritz offered to go forward alone, and to hold a parley with the chief of the tribe, but La Salle would not permit it. He had reason to believe that his enemies had warned the Illinois tribes against him, and had represented him as being the ally of their bitter foes, the Iroquois. He was very uncertain what kind of reception they would get, and he made his preparations accordingly.

Swanalulu on his return confirmed Claude's report. There were a considerable number of huts on either side of the river, and the party was plainly a large one. At present they appeared to have no inkling of the near presence of the white men, but they were certain to discover it quickly, and perhaps the best policy was to take them by surprise.

La Salle had eight canoes, and he at once ordered his men into them. He placed Tonty in the one next to the right bank of the river, and himself in the one nearest to the left bank; then he instructed his men to paddle lustily, keeping the eight canoes all abreast until in full sight of the Indians, and then to lay down their paddles and take up their arms in readiness, though on no account to use them until he gave the word.

In this way the little flotilla rapidly approached the Indian settlement, the Dautray boys, who occupied one canoe, with their respective fathers—a party of six in all—gazing with eager eyes along the banks, waiting for the first indication of the settlement.

Suddenly the canoes shot round a bend in the river.

“There they are! there they are!” cried Claude, who was at the prow; and they heard La Salle’s ringing voice giving the word,—

“Paddles down—to your arms, men!”

The swift current carried the canoes onwards into the startled camp of the Indians, who at once set up a tumult like that of so many forest jackals or parrots. The squaws and children screeched in terror; the men seized their clubs and tomahawks and rushed towards the strand. But La Salle kept cool and calm in all the hubbub, and driving his canoe ashore, leaped lightly out, immediately followed by the six Dautrays, and afterwards by the rest of his party, who stood with their guns in their hands passively waiting for orders.

In his hands La Salle held the magic calumet, or peace-pipe, and at sight of that the chief threw down his weapons and advanced with another, whilst the other warriors rushed to the banks and checked by their authoritative gestures the hasty flight of arrows which the young men on the farther side were preparing to launch. Father Fritz, whose knowledge of Indian languages and Indian ways was almost equal to that of La Salle, whilst his personal charm was infinitely greater,

picked up one or two screaming children, and after pacifying them with smiles and caresses, handed them back to their trembling and admiring mothers. The other fathers, following this lead, spoke kindly and encouragingly to the people, and in a few minutes the crisis had passed, and for the present all was harmony.

The guests were led into the camp with every mark of honour. They were taken to the wigwam of the chief, and seated in a circle round it. Then the inevitable feast was prepared, which was rather more trying than usual, for the ordinary bowls in which the food was placed were dispensed with by this tribe, who regarded it as a mark of courtesy to place the morsels of food in the mouths of their guests with their own fingers, whilst others rubbed their feet with bear's grease in token of good-fellowship.

La Salle, as soon as he was able to get a hearing in the tumult, endeavoured to explain the object of his visit, and the great good which would come to the Illinois if they would become the friends and allies of the French. He unfolded his great scheme to the eager ears of those more or less able to grasp its import, and spoke of the hardships he and his men had passed through in order to secure their end. He adroitly mentioned the "loan" of some of their corn, and his willingness to pay amply for everything taken, and the gifts were brought in and spread before the brightening eyes of the chief and his warriors. Then La Salle added that if the Illinois people would not befriend him, he should be forced to carry his offer of friendship and goodwill to the neighbouring tribe

of the Osages, who would doubtless be overwhelmed with joy at the prospect opened before them of such an increase of prosperity.

This was a master-stroke upon the part of La Salle, and Tonty's eyes gleamed with amusement as he heard the commander's harangue. The jealousy of this tribe against the Osages was deeply rooted and bitter. At once the chief professed himself devoted to the interests of the white man. The sparkling eyes of the squaws and warriors, who were gazing greedily upon the presents displayed, spoke an equally eloquent language. The alliance of friendship was sealed with promises and presents, and the strangers were conducted with pomp and ceremony to certain huts set apart for them, where they were requested to pass the night.

The party, wearied by the exertions of the day, and by the clamour of the Indian camp, sank at last into profound slumber. That the noise without continued still did not disturb them. Nature exhausted sought repose, and the travellers had learned by this time to sleep pretty well anywhere and everywhere, to the thunder of falling waters or the breathless silence of a snowbound forest.

Towards dawn Gaspard was awakened by a soft touch upon his hand. Rousing himself quickly he saw the crouching figure of Swanalulu beside him. The rest of his party lay sleeping wrapped in their blankets. The Indian laid a hand upon his lips in token of silence and caution.

Swanalulu had attached himself especially to Gaspard during the months he had been with the party. He almost always, when not hunting at night in the forest, slept at his feet, and divided his services of personal devotion between Father Fritz and the lad. A strong bond of quick mutual understanding existed between the Indian and the French-Englishman, and the moment Gaspard's eyes fell upon the crouching figure beside him, he knew that Swanalulu had something important to tell or to show him.

Quickly and cautiously therefore he arose and slipped from among his sleeping companions, following the Indian, who crept along the ground in snake-like fashion, making for a large circle illumined by the rays of a big fire, where it seemed as though the whole tribe had gathered to listen to the oration of a tall dusky Indian who stood in their midst, his painted body well lit up by the dancing flame of the fire.

"It is Monso," whispered Swanalulu, "wicked, false Monso, the chief of the Mascoutins. He is telling false tales to the Illinois. Listen to him now! He is seeking to persuade them that we are enemies and treacherous to boot. Hark to what he says!"

Gaspard wriggled a little nearer and listened with intensity. He was able to understand the drift of the speech, which was being delivered with a great deal of the impassioned eloquence which stamped the Indian orator.

Monso had evidently been well primed by the enemies

of La Salle. He was persuading the Illinois that the Frenchmen were their deadly enemies; that they were the friends of the Iroquois; that they were now going south and west to stir up all the river tribes against them; and that soon the Illinois would be attacked on all sides by these hordes of foes and totally exterminated, so that their only hope lay in absolutely putting a stop to the march of the French through their country.

Gaspard listened with flashing eyes and heaving chest. He longed to rise and thrust the false words of the Indian down his throat; but a warning touch from Swanalulu withheld him from any such rash act, and he lay perfectly still till the oration was ended.

Then he and his Indian friend crept back to their own quarters, just as the first ray of light penetrated the forest and paled the light of the camp fire.

The meeting broke up. The Mascoutin chief vanished into the forest, apparently having no desire to be confronted by the Frenchmen whom he had maligned. Gaspard found his way to the tent of La Salle, and told the whole story to him, Tonty, and the fathers, who were sharing the largest of the huts allotted to the party.

La Salle's face grew dark. It seemed as though at every turn the jealous enmity of his foes was to pursue and thwart him. But at least his was a nature that never drooped or quailed before the buffets of adverse fortune. He called up Swanalulu and questioned him closely as to all he knew of the matter. The Indian said that the false Monso had brought many gifts for the Illinois, which had

been buried under the floor of the chief's hut so that the French might not see them. He told more fully than Gaspard had been able to do the words and arguments used to persuade the Illinois to retard the Frenchmen in their progress, or failing that, to seek to dishearten their followers, so that they might desert the expedition and cause its failure. It was a story that could not but make the leaders look grave and anxious, for amongst their party there were men of whose fidelity they were none too sure. A little tampering with such as these might do untold harm. Still, forewarned was forearmed, and La Salle spoke words of commendation to Swanalulu and Gaspard for their prompt action in this matter.

It was plain enough, when they rose and went out in the morning, that a change had come over their entertainers. They no longer hastened to offer them food and friendly attentions, but looked cold and sullen and suspicious. Father Fritz and the other friars went about from hut to hut, speaking kindly to the women, and seeking to win their confidence in return. The poor creatures seemed half afraid to speak or commit themselves, but they listened with some eagerness when Father Fritz began to speak to them very simply and tenderly about the universal brotherhood of the human family, and how it was the desire of the great God, who had made them all, that they should love and trust one another. It was a difficult creed to receive, for they had grown up amid bloodshed and cruel warfare; but there

were those amongst the listeners who drank in eagerly this gospel of good-will, one of the most intelligent being the wife of Nicanopé, the brother of the chief. She was a really beautiful woman, and had a strain of white blood in her, as began to be the case sometimes with Indians, owing to the intermarriage of some of their women with the *coureurs de bois*. Perhaps it was this that gave to her such a quick understanding of the beautiful message of peace and goodwill to men that Father Fritz was so well qualified to give. She asked many questions, listened with the greatest attention to the replies, and finally said that if the French believed and taught such beautiful things, it would be a great and happy thing for the Indian people when they came to settle amongst them.

Towards noon there came an invitation for La Salle and his party to a feast at the house of this same Nicanopé. The invitation was promptly accepted, and in course of time the commander ushered in his men, and they were provided with white and red mats to sit upon, whilst to-day (perhaps because they were not in such favour as on the former occasion) a wooden bowl was provided for each, and his share of bear meat or boiled corn was placed in it.

Whilst they ate, the host made them a speech. He said he had asked them less to refresh their bodies than because he had to warn them seriously of the dangers to which they were exposed if they persisted in this mad expedition. The banks of the great Mississippi, which they hardly expected to navigate, swarmed with ferocious

tribes, so numerous, so savage, so inimical to any stranger, that certain death, and that a most horrible one, awaited them if they persisted in tempting fortune. Then the river itself was full of dangers—mighty cataracts, foaming rapids, and like perils. In addition to this, it was swarming with serpents, alligators, and terrible monsters the very names of which were unknown, and which fed on human flesh and were gifted with almost human intelligence and ferocity. Not only this, but the river itself never reached the sea at all, but after a while ran into a series of terrific whirlpools, the like of which was never seen elsewhere, and ended by plunging headlong into an unfathomable gulf, which, like a live thing greedy of prey, would inevitably swallow them and their vessels for ever if they dared to approach even within ten miles of it; for so swift and sudden was the current that there was no escaping from it. From floating in calm and peaceful waters, the luckless mariner suddenly found himself in the vortex of such a mighty volume of water, that he was helpless as an infant, and after being dashed about and hurried along with a velocity there was no resisting, he would at the last be hurled into this bottomless abyss, and perish terribly with his work all undone.

La Salle waited patiently till the orator, warming up with his subject, had finished his graphic speech. He trusted that his followers did not understand the gist of it, but feared that some amongst them at least were able to follow the rapid utterances of the chief. Then when

Nicanopé had finished, he rose in his calm and commanding way, and made a straightforward answer.

He thanked his host for the friendly warning, but told him that Frenchmen had never shrunk from danger yet, and that, the greater were the perils, the greater would be the glory. Then suddenly changing his tone, and fixing his eyes upon the principal men who sat round, he broke into a torrent of eloquence equal to their own,—

“ My friends,” he said, “ ye have been deceived by lies. Think ye that we saw not the false Monso when he stole hither by night to poison your minds against those who had smoked the peace-pipe in your midst ? Think ye that we saw not the rich gifts he brought to you to buy you over to his false policy towards us—gifts that for very shame ye buried yonder beneath the lodge of your chief ? ”

The men exchanged wondering glances, drew together, and felt indeed that a miraculous power was possessed by these wonderful men.

“ If it was the truth that he told you,” pursued La Salle, “ why did he not stay to face me like a man ? Why did he skulk away in the dimness of the dawn, like the guilty liar that he is ? He would persuade you that we were your enemies ; but have we acted as such ? Did we not find your camp all in confusion yesterday ?—could we not have fallen upon you and killed you before your warriors from the woods could have come to your aid ? If we desired to do you hurt, could we not do it now ? As for the Iroquois, we need not wait for

them. Our fire machines could slay you all as you sit, did we but wish it. The Iroquois have already felt our heavy hand ere now. They are no friends and allies of ours. We wage not war with any Indian nation who will live at peace with us, but the Illinois are more to us than the Iroquois, and we have come to you laden with goods and merchandise, as friends and not as foes. Go after that false Monso, bring him back hither, and let him make good his words. Let us speak with him face to face before your eyes, for he never saw us or the Iroquois. The stories he tells have been put into his mouth by our enemies and slanderers. He has been bribed by them to deceive you with lies, and to sunder you from your best and truest friends."

The warriors and such principal men as the camp contained listened with understanding and pleasure to these words. They were glad enough to remain on friendly terms with their white visitors, whom they feared and admired, and the dauntless bearing of La Salle always commanded the respect of the Indians.

The feast proceeded merrily, and it was hoped by the leaders that things were taking a better turn. Nevertheless the commander thought it wise at night to post sentinels around the huts where they were lodged, in case of treachery on the part of the natives.

Gaspard volunteered for this duty, and his comrades were two recruits who had joined the expedition at Niagara. They were, in fact, *coureurs de bois*, and excellent men for the rough and tumble life they had to

lead in the wilds, being well used to hardships and privation. But they also were very well acquainted with the Indian language, and when Gaspard went to summon them to come on duty, he found them sitting amid a ring of long-faced comrades, to whom they were recounting in detail the speech of Nicanopé, in which he recounted all the perils and dangers that lay before them in the savage wilderness into which they were about to penetrate.

When he had got his men outside Gaspard spoke to them with some heat of manner.

“How can you be so foolish as to stuff their heads with the lies of that false Monso? You know better yourselves. You know it was but said to scare us and keep us from our goal. If peril threatens, are we not men enough to meet and grapple it? But to frighten ourselves with false fire—that is unworthy of our manhood. Shame upon you, to seek to raise the fears of our ignorant countrymen, who are but too ready to believe all they hear!”

The men looked sullen and ashamed, but made no reply, and each took up his station as marked out by La Salle. The commander visited his sentinels the last thing at night, and conversed a little with Gaspard. Then he retired to his tent, and darkness fell upon the camp, the Indians themselves sleeping sound and deep after their vigil of the previous night.

Gaspard paced up and down his beat with scrupulous exactitude, ears alert for any unwonted sound, eyes straining through the gloom for the sight of creeping

foe. He felt certain that Swanalulu would not be far off, though he might not see him. He heard from time to time the footsteps of his fellow-watchers, and exchanged a challenge with them ; but towards daybreak the silence was so deep, that he fancied the other sentinels must be sleeping at their posts, and he uttered a low whistle, which instantly brought the Indian leaping to his side.

“ Where are Robert and Stephen ? ” he asked. “ Go see, and rouse them if they be sleeping. I have heard nought of them this last hour. I fear they have been overcome by drowsiness. The commander must not find them thus.”

Swanalulu bounded away, but quickly returned. In the dim grey of the early dawn his ivory teeth gleamed white.

“ They are gone, gone, gone ! They have taken their arms and run to the forest ! I see their tracks. There are five have gone, those two and three others, and some bags of meal with them.”

Gaspard uttered a quick exclamation of dismay.

“ Gone ! deserted, dost thou mean ? Gone altogether ? not to return ? ”

“ It was because they were frightened. They were frightened because of the stories Monso told. They told them to the rest, and it has frightened them. They have agreed to run away together. The men in the big tent say so. They wanted them all to desert, but some are more afraid of the winter-forest. But all are full of

fears for the task that lies before them. They hate the commander, and declare that he has led them out into the wilderness to perish."

This was the gist of Swanalulu's story, and Gaspard with a heavy heart went to the hut where La Salle slept, to impart the tidings to him.

CHAPTER X.

FORT CRÊVECŒUR.

LA SALLE stood upright in the midst of his followers, wan and pale, but with the light of an indomitable courage shining in his sombre eyes. He leaned upon a staff as he confronted the thinned ranks of his followers. He looked like a man who had passed through some severe ordeal, both physical and mental. Yet there was nothing but the old dauntless purpose and resolve stamped upon his face and his whole personality.

Before him stood his men in rank. Upon some faces there was a look of sullen depression, upon others that of suspicion and dislike, whilst in the eyes of a few there burnt the fire of devoted loyalty and unflinching courage. Notable amongst the latter class were the six Dautrays, upon whom La Salle had come to look with gratitude and trust. The two elder men, Jean and Pierre, had proved themselves able and resolute workmen, willing to turn their hand to anything, and contented and brave in adversity and hardship. The elder brother, Pierre, was by trade a blacksmith, and was

unequaled at the forge. His son, Louis, followed in his footsteps, and was growing into a brawny and muscular young fellow, of no small value in the diminished camp. Jean had proved his skill in the shipbuilding above Niagara, and La Salle had already taken counsel with him as to the possibility of constructing another vessel here on the waters of the Illinois, which should be strong and large enough to convey the whole party down the waters of the Mississippi to the sea. Jules was in all things his father's right hand, and his silent energy and intense loyalty and love towards La Salle had made him something of a power in the camp. Those keen hawk's eyes saw everything that passed, and evildoers strove to keep out of their radius. If Gaspard and Claude were the greater favourites, owing to their bright faces and readiness of speech, Jules was regarded with great respect, and by the Indians with a species of reverence which gave him influence and authority over them.

Amongst the faithful might now be counted the dark-browed Duplessis, upon whose sullen nature Father Fritz had succeeded in making a deep impression. He made no protestations, but he began to show himself worthy of trust, and he had stood firm when others had turned traitors and cowards and had fled. The party had also been reinforced and gladdened by the arrival of a young and cheerful Frenchman, a traveller in search of adventure, the *Sieur de Boisrondet*, who was eager to be one of La Salle's party, and who, with his servant *l'Espérance*,

had done much towards encouraging the failing spirits of La Salle.

The fathers were, of course, trusty and faithful. Father Fritz, with untiring patience, gathered the Indians together daily for instruction, and was beginning to see some small fruits of his labours amongst them. But the other friars found them too disgusting in their habits, and too hopelessly blind and ignorant to be amenable to their influence. They did not possess the power of their less orthodox brother of extending a real and unfeigned love towards the most degraded of human creatures, and drawing out all that was best and noblest in that savage nature. They contented themselves with saying mass in the camp as often as occasion permitted, and addressing words of encouragement and admonition to the French and Flemings of their number.

Yet these fatherly admonitions had not hindered the spirit of insubordination and lawlessness. Not only had desertions been numerous, but there had been a deliberate attempt made to poison La Salle—an attempt which had wellnigh succeeded; and but for the promptitude with which Father Fritz had sought for and found healing herbs as an antidote, the commander's bones would have been left in the wilderness, and the expedition have come to a tragic end.

Even now he looked wan and weak and shaken, although his energy was unquenched and unquenchable. He eyed the ranks of men before him, and asked in his clarion voice,—

“ Who is on my side ?—who ? For let all faint-hearted and unwilling return the way they came. I want none with me save those whose arms are strong and whose hearts are stout. Such as are fearful and wavering, and are scared by any bogus tale of imaginary perils invented by our foes, are not men for me. Let them go their own way. I ask none to follow me but those whose hearts beat with patriotism and courage, and who are ready to face danger and death for the glory of our enterprise, and the honour and wealth of France !”

A cheer broke from the lips of the whole group of the Dautrays, and was taken up by Tonty, Boisrondet, and the friars. After a momentary wavering, the rest joined in, and for a moment La Salle's face softened and took a gentler expression, as the men crowded about him, and expressed their devotion to the cause. It had been rather a bold challenge to throw down, with his camp so broken and divided ; but La Salle never shrank from danger, and he was sick at heart with the desertions which had so greatly reduced his numbers. It seemed to him better to send his men away, than see them stealing off to the forest by ones and twos. And indeed it might now be the lesser peril to push on into milder latitudes than to attempt to brave the rigours of the Canadian winter forests. It was possible that some of the waverers felt this when they elected to stay and see the expedition through.

All this time La Salle and his party had been the guests of the Indians, though dwelling in separate

quarters; but on that very day, the ice on the river having yielded to a sudden thaw—though it was only January—he decided to set forth in his canoe, taking Tonty, Father Fritz, and Boisrondet with him, to seek for a place where a fort might be built, and where he could house his men and stores safely till the inclement season was past, thus removing them from the influence of the Indians, who were still very much disposed to work upon their fears, and hold them back from the enterprise.

Jules, Gaspard, and Swanalulu were selected as the crew, and eagerly did they send the light canoe down the swift stream, avoiding the ice-blocks in the river, and fetching many a compass to obtain a clear channel. Whilst the boys paddled, and Swanalulu stood in the prow directing their course, the four men talked earnestly together, and the boys heard their counsels.

The Sieur de Boisrondet brought evil tidings, inasmuch as he brought no tidings of the *Griffin*. He declared certainly that she had never reached Michili Mackinac, and that she was not upon Lake Michigan. He had been long wandering in the region of the lake, and had neither heard nor seen a sign of her. La Salle had sent his faithful Mohegan hunter to try to bring back news of her, but he was already steeling himself to the thought of her loss. It would indeed be a crushing blow, for the stores on board were the mainstay of the expedition; but he would not yet allow himself to

despair of her safety, though it was plain that he was deeply anxious about her.

The canoe descended the river rapidly. They had gone perhaps a half-league from the Indian camp, when Father Fritz, whose watchful eyes were ever on the alert, pointed to a rising eminence upon the bank and said,—

“Surely that is just such a spot as we are in search of!”

All turned and looked. Upon the southern bank of the river rose a low knoll with a flat top, situated between two rather deep ravines, and with a marshy tract in front some two hundred yards across dividing it from the river. Tonty, with his soldier's eyes, instantly exclaimed that it was almost in itself a natural fortification. The party speedily disembarked, and, before another hour had passed, Jules and Gaspard were paddling back to the Indian camp in great excitement to muster the men at this spot, in order to commence the task of constructing the fort.

After a period of idleness, all were ready to recommence work; and to those who had been scared by tales of invasion of the fierce Iroquois tribes, it was satisfactory to contemplate the thought of dwelling in a fortified place, instead of in bark huts and wigwams.

The spot chosen was speedily made into an excellent wooden fortress. The two ravines were joined together by a deep ditch; the sides of the mound were sloped steeply down, and the top, which was almost square,

was levelled and protected by a strong palisade and an embankment of earth. At each corner of the square thus enclosed was a building—a strong timber house made of a stout wood of the forest which had proved itself to be musket-proof. In two of these houses the men had their quarters; La Salle, Tonty, and the fathers occupied the third; whilst the fourth was given up to the forge and workmen's sheds. This fort was rapidly erected by men who looked forward with satisfaction to sleeping safely within its sheltering walls; and La Salle called it Fort Crêvecœur, perhaps in somewhat scornful remembrance of the events which had just gone before.

Every day he watched for the return of his hunter, and at length sent Swanalulu after him to try to find and bring him back. Upon the safety of the *Griffin* almost everything now depended, and his anxious fears communicated themselves to the rest of his followers, who watched and waited with ever-increasing anxiety.

“I see them! I see them! They are coming back!” shouted Claude one bright February morning, as he kept his eager outlook from the turret of the commander's house, which commanded the widest view over the surrounding country. “There is Nimrod, and Swanalulu with him! They are coming straight here! They will be with us directly!”

All was hubbub and excitement. The men swarmed out from their worksheds, where they were busy. La Salle strode forth from his house, with Tonty and Boisorondet beside him. The sentry on duty fired a salute

as the two dusky figures of Nimrod (as La Salle had called his hunter) and Swanalulu appeared, whilst their way was pointed out to them by the shouts of the whole community.

“What news?” asked La Salle, with difficulty controlling his anxious apprehension.

Swanalulu looked at him with melancholy eyes, and shook his head several times,—

“Gone, gone, gone!” he said, “gone to the bottom of the lake. No man has seen her. No man knows aught of her. She must have perished in some tempest. She is nowhere above the waters now!”

A quiver passed over the face of La Salle, and the faces of his men grew dark and long. He asked no more questions in public, but beckoned the Indians into his own house, and there in the presence of the fathers and Tonty asked them more of their discovery.

They had met Indians of all tribes, and had made searching inquiries. The Hurons declared she was not on their lake, and had never returned from her first voyage there. Those from Michili Mackinac declared that she had never returned even as far as that place. It was whispered by some that the jealous Jesuits had bribed the crew to scuttle and sink her; by others, that the Indians had fired her; by others still, that the treacherous pilot had landed with the furs and stores, which he had buried in some place for his own future enrichment, and that he had afterwards sunk the vessel. A dozen different stories were circulated about it, but the truth

was never known. All that was plain to the commander was that his vessel was hopelessly gone, with all its stores for the expedition, and that he was left here with his handful of discouraged men in this wild abode of suspicious Indians, with utterly inadequate means for carrying on the enterprise.

Even the cheerful friars were silent and gloomy when this certainty became known to them. Tonty and Boisrondet exchanged glances, but spoke no word. Only Father Fritz approached and laid a kindly hand upon La Salle's shoulder, as he said,—

“Take courage, my son; we know that no hurt can befall us save by the permission of the Lord. If He thinks well to try our faith and endurance, let us not murmur. We are here as His ambassadors. It may be He has work for us, of which we know nothing. Shall we take good from His hand, and not evil? Nay, but we will take both alike, and find good in all, because it His doing.”

La Salle grasped the hand of the father in silence, but attempted no reply.

“I would be alone,” he said; “I must think.”

And forthwith he strode from the camp, signing only to Jules and Swanalulu to follow him; for it was against his own rule that any person, save an Indian, should go forth into the forest alone, and he never made a rule for others which he did not abide by himself.

The silent one and the Indian followed him at a respectful distance, the latter telling Jules in greater

detail the rumours respecting the ill-fated *Griffin*. From time to time he raised bow and arrow, and shot down some passing game to take home, which Jules shouldered and carried along. Suddenly, as he was about to shoot after hearing a sound in the brushwood, he paused and said,—

“That is no bird ; that is an Indian in the thicket.”

In another moment he had dashed in and dragged out a young Illinois, who was in a very enfeebled condition, looking half starved and ready to faint.

La Salle’s attention being attracted, he came to the spot, and asked what was the matter.

After the young man had swallowed a few mouthfuls from the flask presented to him by Jules, he revived enough to be able to explain that he had been absent a long while from the camp hunting ; but having been stricken by an intermittent fever, he had been deserted by the rest of the tribe, and had been gradually making his way back as best he could. Some days he could travel well, whilst on others he was so weak that he could do nought but lie still in the bushes till the shiverings left him, on which days, having nothing to eat, he often became terribly enfeebled, and was almost afraid he would die before reaching home.

A sudden idea entered the mind of La Salle.

“Help this young man to the camp, and we will feed and cure him,” he said briefly, and the sufferer was glad enough to be helped thither. He was taken to the house of the commander, where a plentiful meal was

set before him, and Father Fritz gave him some of his valuable medicines, which soon allayed the fever, and restored him in a wonderful way. Then La Salle went to him, and began to question him, not with any apparent purpose, about the countries he had visited in his wanderings, and especially about the Mississippi River, with which he seemed well acquainted. The youth, who had been long away from his tribe, and knew nothing of what had passed there, spoke freely and truthfully to the white man who had been kind to him. He described everything he was asked to do, gave a favourable and most encouraging account of the great river and its inhabitants, and had not a word as to monsters of the deep, whirlpools, or any other extraordinary perils. La Salle's powerful personality attracted him, as it did almost all Indians; and he asked, with sparkling eyes, whether he might not lead the servant of the great Onontio to this river, and show him the truth of all that he had spoken.

La Salle answered the youth kindly, and brought out from his stores a hatchet, at sight of which the eyes of the young savage shone with longing and delight.

"This shall be yours, my friend," said the commander, "and you shall join our party if you will. But first you shall learn to know my men. So whilst I go forth upon my own business, you shall go with Swanalulu to see them at work. Tell to them the things that you have told to me, and you shall be amply rewarded."

Jules and Gaspard were called in then, and La Salle spoke with them for a few minutes earnestly. Then, whilst Gaspard and Swanalulu took the young man, gave him some clothing, and showed him round the fort, La Salle, with Tonty and Jules in attendance, made his way to the Indian camp they had quitted, where Father Fritz was now the only regular visitor, and where, but for his regular ministrations and teachings, an ill feeling might have arisen between its inhabitants and those at the fort.

With a stern face and commanding air La Salle bid the men assemble themselves together, as he had something to say to them. They obeyed him at once, exchanging wondering looks of apprehension.

When he stood in the midst of the dusky throng, he regarded them sternly, and then asked in a loud voice,—

“How is it that you, to whom all kindness and friendship have been shown, have banded together to seek to deceive the children of the great Onontio? Think you to blind the eyes that can see everything. Listen, and I will prove your falseness unto you.”

Then he began to describe with such minuteness and accuracy the river Mississippi, which he had never seen, that the Indians gazed upon him with wondering eyes, looked at each other in awe; and, clapping their hands to their mouths in token of wonder and shame, made a humble confession of their falsehood, declaring that their motive had been the hope of keeping these children of the light always with them, whilst now they would

remove afar off, and perhaps they would never see them again.

La Salle's face relaxed at this, and, having gained his point, he graciously forgave the imposture. He carried off one or two of the chief Indians to come to a spot near to his camp, tell their tale, and make confession in the ears of his followers; whilst Jules ran forward and brought them out to listen, only taking care that the young Indian should not make his appearance among them.

The friars laughed heartily at the ruse adopted by La Salle, and commended him heartily. Only the gentle face of Father Fritz looked grave, though he spoke no word. And when Gaspard asked him if he did not approve of what had been done, he replied gravely and thoughtfully,—

“Let us be very slow to condemn our brethren, and especially those who are in a great strait. It is not for us to judge anything before the time, but always to hope, and use patience and brotherly love. Yet I would rather our commander had simply spoken the truth, and had admitted the source of his information. We who go amongst these poor benighted creatures in the name of the Holy One of God should fear to stoop to any smallest act of deceitfulness. We may not do evil that good may come. If yon Indians learn by-and-by how this knowledge came to us, will they not say in their hearts, ‘They pretended to a power which they did not possess. We too may pretend to such things if they advantage us.’”

Gaspard nodded his head gravely. He understood what was meant. He saw again and again that the taint of expediency marred and poisoned the actions and the words of the Romanist friars, whilst deceit and subterfuge of any kind seemed to have no place in Father Fritz's soul. Evil seemed to roll away from him, as though it could find no resting-place there. Even the Indians felt his power, and loved him with a strange and earnest love.

“He has the power of the Great Spirit with him,” they said; and well did Gaspard understand their meaning.

A few days later the camp was further cheered by the arrival of a deputation of Indians from various tribes—Chickasaw, Arkansas, and Osage warriors—who came on a friendly visit, and who told the white men that a warm welcome awaited them from the tribes along the river banks, who had heard rumours of their coming, and assured them that its waters were navigable quite to the mouth, and no dangers such as they had heard of were to be apprehended.

This confirmation of the good news put the men into better spirits than they had been in for long. La Salle took courage and heart, but still the problem faced him, how were cables and anchors and stores for the new vessel to be obtained, now that the *Griffin* had sunk? And more than this, how was the vessel herself to be built, when his best carpenters and all his sawyers had deserted him, and taken to the forest?

With his men about him he spoke of these things, and said,—

“If we have to wait to get others from Montreal a year will be wasted. Shall that be? Now, my friends, I am no sawyer myself, and yet, methinks, I could turn to and learn the art, if I can find a couple amongst your number that will help me!”

Hardly had the words left his lips before Jules stood at his side. Jean Dautray and the sailor Colin followed quickly. None of them had ever done this particular work, but all were eagerly willing to try. Others pressed forwards offering to do their best, and in a short while the place rang with the sound of steady sawing: plank after plank was sawn, practice soon giving finish to the work, till the material for the vessel was almost all in readiness, and the labour of placing her upon the stocks began.

But where and how could she be fitted up? That was the problem exercising the mind of the dauntless La Salle. The forest would furnish timber enough for a fleet, but the needful iron was not to be had. Many a time and oft did he turn this problem over in his mind, and at last he spoke openly to Tonty.

“There is but one thing for it. I, with a couple of followers, must return on foot to Fort Frontenac, and obtain the needful supplies from thence. Think you that you can hold this place safely, and finish the vessel in my absence? I will speed over the ground as fast as foot of mortal man can travel; and then will return

with all needful supplies, and we will forth upon our voyage with some hope of ultimate success."

Tonty knew not the meaning of fear. Certainly to be left in this wilderness with even less faithful men than the fort at present held—for La Salle must take away followers upon whose undoubted good faith he could rely—was a prospect from which many a stout-hearted man might shrink ; but Tonty agreed without a murmur, and even made no objection when La Salle suggested that Father Hennepin (who was complaining of the monotony of life in the camp, and the impossibility of getting hold of the Indians) should take a canoe and go upon a preparatory voyage of discovery along the lower Illinois and the upper Mississippi, and bring them word again what they might have to encounter there.

Bold as Father Hennepin was, he rather staggered at this proposition, but finally consented to undertake the expedition, provided that he might pick out two companions on whose fidelity he could rely. The Dautrays wondered if they would be selected as his companions, but their devotion to Father Fritz and their Protestantism rendered them slightly uncongenial to Father Hennepin. He chose Antoine Auguel and Picard du Gay, men who had been stanch to La Salle throughout ; and just before La Salle set forth upon his journey, the father asked the prayers and blessings of his brethren, received a benediction from old Father Gabriel, and was seen to shoot away in his canoe into the midst of the stream, which quickly carried him out of sight.

Then came La Salle's turn to choose his companions for this difficult journey through the perils of the forest, where famine, treachery, and death seemed to await him on every side. Long and earnestly did he debate the matter with Tonty as to whom they could best spare from the camp, whilst the Italian declared it was for La Salle to take those upon whom he could most fully depend.

At last the choice was made. Jean Dautray and his son Jules were selected first, then the sailor Colin, and a useful fellow of not especial talent called Hunaut. La Salle asked Father Fritz to give them his blessing, and address all the men in one of those quiet but eloquent pastoral speeches which he had known before to work so excellently upon them.

Then with many embraces, tears, good wishes, and hopes for a prosperous reunion, La Salle and his men loaded themselves with the few necessaries for their journey, and, escorted by the whole party to the edge of the forest, disappeared within its gloomy recesses; whilst Tonty, with a look of care and gravity upon his cheerful face, marched back to his fort with his diminished band, saying to himself as he did so,—

“Half a dozen trusty fellows, and a dozen knaves. That is about my garrison. But I will hold on to the end, so long as one will stand by me!”

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

“**N**OW, my men, our leader has left us for a while ; but we have our work cut out before us in his absence. Let us set to work with a will upon our vessel, and let every day see an advance in our task. Let us put our hearts into our labour, that when the commander comes back with all needful plenishings, he may find her fair and fit for the wonderful voyage that lies before her down the great river, robbed of all its fanciful terrors.”

So spoke Tonty to the assembled camp at the fort, and the *Sieur de Boisrondet* raised a cheer, in which the voices of the *Dautrays* were heard quickly joining. Then the young fellow began trolling out a gay song as he led the way to the stocks on which the vessel lay. *Pierre Dautray* went to his forge with his son, and the blows of the anvil rang cheerily out through the sunny air. There was a faint breath as of coming spring wafted through the forest that day, and it brought with it a thrill of hope and joy which penetrated all hearts. And although the more experienced

knew that the winter was not over yet, and that ice and snow might again close them in, yet they had reached a latitude rather more genial than the one they had left behind at Fort Frontenac, or Montreal and Quebec, and might look for an earlier season than residents there could hope for.

Gaspard and Claude would have worked willingly at the vessel had it not been that they were told off as hunters, to supply the camp with provisions. The Mohegan hunter, Nimrod, had gone with La Salle, who had, of course, one or two Indians with him in addition to the Frenchmen chosen. Swanalulu remained at Fort Crèveceur, and the young Illinois warrior who had been brought in by La Salle also craved leave to remain, and was of great service in the tracking of game. His name was Tessouat, and he knew the forests well, and as the French boys roved far and wide in search of provisions for their fellows, he would tell them long, strange tales of the wonders he had seen, and in particular of a certain green valley, away many leagues to the south, where he declared there dwelt a colony of white men, who lived to themselves, spoke a strange tongue, and cultivated their land in ways unknown to the Indians, although they kept on friendly terms with them, and had never been molested.

Gaspard and Claude accepted this story with a certain reservation, for Tessouat was endowed with a vivid imagination, and had a trick of embellishing and exaggerating. Nevertheless they listened with a decided

sense of fascination to the story told them of this shut-in valley with its pale-skinned inhabitants, and had there been less pressing need for them at the fort, they might even have asked permission to go and visit it. By land through the forest it was about a three days' journey, but it could be accomplished much more quickly by water—that is, from the fort to the valley—along the quick current of the river, now brawling along, swelled to the brink by melting snows. The journey from the valley to the fort would be more quickly undertaken on foot, as it was no light matter to urge any craft upwards against the flood. However, the lads had no present intention of verifying Tessouat's statement, for their hands and time were fully occupied in providing food for the camp, and they knew well how important it was to keep the larder well supplied if the men were to remain content, and to do their work cheerfully and well.

Not far from the fort, by a rather intricate path through the forest, a stretch of green prairie could be gained, which was just beginning to put on its spring dress of verdure, and to become the resort of the buffalo herds, of which the French boys had often heard, but which they had never seen until now. A supply of buffalo meat would be of the greatest value to the camp, and eagerly they pursued and stalked the shaggy monsters, sometimes running hairbreadth escapes of being tossed or trampled upon, but meeting with good success on the whole, and keeping their comrades

well pleased by the quantities of smoked buffalo meat now stored in the larder, whilst themselves growing more strong and hardy and skilful every week of their lives.

Upon one bright day, rather late in February, Gaspard and Claude had been separated from their Indian companions by a charge of angry bull buffaloes, which had forced the party to scatter hither and thither, and the brothers had had some trouble to escape the furious charge of one infuriated fellow, against whom they had fruitlessly discharged their muskets. The shots only served to enrage the monster still more. With a bellow which sounded almost in their very ears he dashed at them, and it was only with the exercise of extreme agility that the pair contrived to avoid him, and let him blunder on past them, his head almost on the ground, his red eyes gleaming through his thick mane, his breath snorting from his nostrils in steaming jets.

“This way, Claude, this way! quick! quick!” shouted Gaspard, seizing his brother by the hand, and darting away in a diagonal direction. His quick eyes had seen the huge cavity of a blasted oak tree standing some few hundred yards away to the right, which if they could gain, they could shelter within its encircling walls until the perplexed buffalo had moved off elsewhere.

Claude caught at this idea in a second, and the pair were quickly speeding over the plain; whilst the buffalo, finding his quarry no longer in front of him, paused, pulled up and stared round him, afterwards renewing

his headlong gallop in pursuit of the fleeing foe. But the lads had now a good start, and although the bull tore after them at a speed which would soon have brought him up with them, they were able to gain the covert of the hollow tree, and to slip into its dark interior several seconds before the furious animal rushed past with louder snortings of rage.

The change from the level glories of the dawn, the rays of which had been shining in their eyes, to the darkness of the hollow tree rendered their retreat as black as pitch to them, and it was no wonder that they both started violently when the sound of a little frightened scream almost in their ears told them that they were not alone in this hiding-place. But the curious thing was that this little cry was not like that of any wild animal, nor yet like that of an Indian. It brought flashing back to Gaspard's memory the voice of a little girl playmate he had known in England—in that life which now seemed more like a dream to him than a reality. Perhaps this was the reason why he suddenly spoke aloud, and in English, although for so long he had used no language save that of the Indians or of his French comrades.

“Is anybody here?” he asked, his heart beating rather fast, partly from the hasty flight, partly from a queer feeling of present excitement and curiosity.

Imagine the astonishment of both brothers when suddenly, with a rustle and a bound, there sprang up from a heap of leaves lying at the bottom of the hollow

tree a slim, graceful figure, whilst a silvery voice replied in the familiar English tongue,—

“Oh, thank God! thank God! I have found our saviours! I have not journeyed in vain!”

The boys gazed in astonishment at this sudden apparition. In the dimness of the sheltering tree trunk they could only see that they were confronted by a young girl—a white-skinned girl—a girl such as they had not seen since they left the shores of England. She was clad in a long plain dress of some dark-hued stuff, and a small dagger was stuck in the leather belt she wore. Her head was crowned by a mass of rich golden curls, which hung down as far as her shoulders, whilst her eyes were the colour of wood violets, and her skin, though somewhat embrowned by sun and wind, was soft and delicate like the skin of a peach.

She had taken Gaspard's hand, and had carried it to her lips almost as though she did not know what she was doing. The lad blushed crimson, and took the soft little hand between both of his own, saying in an eager, rapid way,—

“Maiden, fair maiden, how come you in these wilds? Who art thou? Art thou a creature of flesh and blood? I can scarce believe that it is not some strange dream. How comest thou hither in these wilds alone and unprotected, and why dost thou speak of us as saviours? I am sore bewildered by all this.”

“I am not quite alone,” answered the girl, in the same soft voice. “My young brother is with me; but

he went forth ere daybreak to prospect, and see if he could find traces of the white men of whom we are in search. We heard from the Indians that they were to be found here, and in our dire necessity he and I set forth to seek them. And though he has not come back yet, God has surely sent you to me. O sirs, will you not come to our aid? for if help reach us not, we shall assuredly all perish miserably!”

“The Lord do so to us, and more also, if we answer not such a call!” cried Gaspard, in sudden excitement. “Maiden, art thou from yon far Green Valley of which we have heard a whisper? Tell me—tell us more of thyself and thy people. We had scarce believed the tale before. But now that mine eyes have looked upon thee, I doubt no longer. Come out into the sunshine and refresh thyself, and tell us thy tale ere thy brother come back to seek thee. Then when we know all, we will hie back to our camp and arm ourselves, and see how many may be spared for this mission, and we will forth with thee to the succour of thy people. Upon the honour of France and England I promise it!” Gaspard’s boyhood seemed suddenly to fall away from him as he spoke, and he looked every inch a man as he stood before the beautiful girl, his face all aglow with generous emotion.

The buffalo was far enough away by this time. The sun had risen over the plain. In this belt of woodland it was bright and sunny as the two boys and the girl stepped out of their dusky retreat. Gaspard gazed in

admiration at the fair face of the maiden, and still holding her small, soft hand, he asked again,—

“Who art thou, fair lady? Tell us of thyself and thy people.”

And she made answer in her soft, sweet voice: “We have come from a great way off, from over wide oceans whose shores I have never seen. I have heard our old people talk of the homes in England, which they quitted long ago, to find for themselves a place of rest and safety, where they might worship God in peace and quietness without fear of man. That is what first brought them to these far-off lands. But for me, I have never known aught else save the Green Valley between the hills, where I was born. There are not many of us, for our young men wander away to hunt or trade, or to dwell amongst the haunts of men. They go forth, and oftentimes we see them no more. But the old people love the valley, and we have made friends of the Indians around, and they bring us meat and furs, and we grow an abundance of corn and flax, and weave garments for ourselves and for them. We hoped to have lived in peace with all men, but the Indians are ever striving and warring amongst themselves, and we cannot hinder them. Thus it is that many amongst the friendly Indian tribes have almost become exterminated. And new tribes infest the land, who, though not molesting us, cannot be counted upon as friends. And now we hear that very soon a party of fierce Sioux are on their way to our country. They

have vowed vengeance, especially upon all white men, because we have sometimes saved prisoners from their cruel hands—at least our young men have done so, when they have been far away hunting, and have reached the country of the Sioux.”

“We have heard of the fierce Sioux,” struck in Gaspard quickly. “Men say that they live along the banks of the upper Mississippi, and that they and the Iroquois are the most fierce and cruel of all the Indian tribes.”

“I can believe that indeed!” answered the girl with a shudder. “I have heard fearful tales of what they can do when provoked, or when a hapless enemy falls into their clutches. Once that awful fate befell one of our young men. I have heard them tell of his torture and death; and the remembrance of that tale has scared sleep from my eyes many and many a night when it has been whispered that the Sioux are abroad.”

“And they say that they are coming once more?” asked Gaspard, with quivering excitement.

“Yes, truly they do. And the tribes by whom we are surrounded are fleeing this way and that. They care not that we are left unprotected. They are not friendly as the Indians before them. They buy our goods and trade with us, and have no desire to harm us, but they will not stand by us in time of danger. They will flee to the fastnesses of the forest and leave us to repel the invaders alone.”

“And will you not flee too?” asked Claude quickly.

“We scarce can do so,” replied the girl; “there are many aged amongst us, and several feeble women. Our homes and our all lie within the sheltering Green Valley. If we are driven forth from it, I fear we shall indeed perish, and our sons and brothers will know not where to find us. The fathers have talked it over times and again, and they keep saying, ‘Let us trust in the Lord, who has hitherto kept and guarded us. Let us pray night and day to Him to save us. He can save with many or with few, and He will hear and answer according to His good pleasure. He can hide us from the eyes of the savages. He can assuage their fury. We will trust to Him, as we have ever done; He has never failed us yet.’ And so methinks there will be no running away to hide ourselves. And yet I fear! I fear!”

She was shaking all over, and Gaspard and Claude cried out in one breath, “Fear not, you shall have help! You shall not be permitted to perish in the wilderness!”

A little sob rose in the girl’s throat. She looked from one face to the other, and the tears stood in her eyes.

“Ah, you are good! you are brave! I knew it. We had heard it. But our people said that the white men were but traders; that they cared only for gain, for furs and riches, and the glory of conquest. The Indians told how many had deserted their own leader, and my grandfather said—the old man who is like the father of our valley—‘Men who have not the fear of

God before their eyes can never be trusted in times of danger. If these men fall away from him they have promised to follow, because there be dangers to be faced, will they stand by us in our time of peril? Nay, they will flee like smoke before the wind; therefore we will abide by ourselves under the shadow of the Almighty.’”

“But we are not all cowards and traitors,” cried Gaspard, hotly. “It was our commander himself who bid the faint-hearted take themselves away, after a few had run to the woods. And some amongst us are the servants of the Almighty God, and ye shall see whether we will not come to the aid of our brethren when they ask our aid.”

“That is what I said,” cried the girl with a light in her eyes. “I said to Harold, my brother, ‘It may be that God will make of us the instruments of salvation. It has come into my heart to go to these our brethren and ask their aid.’ And Harold said he would go forth with me; so, unknown to all, we crept away, telling our secret only to Ruvanni, my foster-sister, and she was to make light of our absence, as though we were out hunting, as sometimes we are. Then we started, and have travelled wellnigh day and night, and believed that we were already nearing our goal.”

At this moment a boy was seen speeding towards them, light of foot as a young fawn. When he saw that his sister was not alone he redoubled his speed, laying his hand upon his dagger as he approached; but in a moment he discovered that these were friends,

not foes, and after a rapid colloquy between brother and sister, the whole party moved across the grassy plain in the direction of the fort.

Harold and Claude walked in advance; Gaspard followed, leading the girl gently and chivalrously by the hand, assisting her steps over any impediments (albeit she was so much the child of the forest as to be almost independent of his aid), for it was sweet to him, after all these years of wild life, to speak again with a fair-faced English maiden, and he asked her eagerly of herself, hanging on her words with keen delight.

Her simple story was soon told. She was the granddaughter of the father of the camp, as the eldest amongst these settlers was called. She had three brothers, but no sister of her own. Harold was the youngest of the brothers, and was seventeen. She herself was nearly eighteen—the same age as Gaspard. Her parents were dead, her father having been killed in a raid of Indians some six years before, and her mother having pined away and died within two years of his death. When asked her name, she smiled and said that it was Mary, but that her grandfather and brothers called her their Mayflower, because she had been born in May.

Mayflower! what innumerable sweet memories the name called up in the mind of the youth who walked beside her! His heart swelled at the remembrance of sweet-scented country lanes, of happy May-day revels, of a hundred things belonging to the old life of which

he had scarce thought since he had sailed from England's shores. He spoke of these things to the girl beside him, she listening with parted lips and shining eyes. It was almost like a new language to her, and one that was full of sweetest interest. Ere the timber ramparts of the fort rose before them, the youth and maiden felt that they had long been friends, and could never more be strangers.

Great was the excitement at the camp when the lads appeared with these white-skinned companions beside them. The men swarmed out to meet and question them. The news was quickly passed on to the lieutenant, and Tonty himself appeared to inquire into the matter, and see what all this stir and excitement meant.

Harold and Mary Neville could speak French as easily as English, as amongst the settlers in the Green Valley there were families of each nationality. They were taken into the house now occupied by Tonty, Boisrondet, Father Fritz, and the two friars; and whilst food and drink were set before them, they told their story frankly and fully, Gaspard and Claude standing respectfully in the background, but evincing by their eager faces and quivering muscles the keenest desire to be permitted to go to the assistance of their white brethren in the Green Valley.

Tonty's face was very grave and thoughtful. On the one hand he could ill spare faithful men from his little garrison; on the other the claims of race were very strong, and, above and beyond this, he instantly

recognized the fact that this infant colony upon or near to the upper Mississippi might be of infinite value to La Salle's projects if it could be saved from present danger, and made perhaps a nucleus of further adventure.

If they sent help now to these people in their present peril, surely in days to come they would repay the kindness by forwarding La Salle's project as far as in them lay. To found colonies along the river banks was one of his pet schemes. Doubtless he must approve the alliance with one already in existence, and would certainly sanction the measure now contemplated.

Father Fritz meantime was gently questioning the girl about herself and her people, and his face was full of tenderness and interest as he listened to her replies. After a short time he drew Tonty aside and said,—

“Let me go to this place; I think I have received a call thither. There are God-fearing men there who are in some peril of falling away into pious superstition and fatalism through lack of clearer light. Let me go to them; I have a strong desire to do so. To my good brethren, the friars, they would be but heretics and outcasts, yet in the sight of God their souls are precious. Of the Indians I have no fear; I have learned how to deal with them. I have been amongst the Sioux before this; methinks I could avert the threatened danger. Let me, at least, be one to go. Send whom else thou wilt.”

Tonty looked thoughtfully at Father Fritz, for whom he had the warmest good-will and personal affection.

“I would sooner spare anybody but thee, father,” he said. “I shall feel that my sheet-anchor is gone with the men when thy back is turned; yet I know that thou art the man for this mission.”

He spoke eagerly and earnestly to him about the advisability of forming an infant colony faithful to La Salle down in the south, along the course of the river. If Father Fritz went he was certain to win the settlers, and to keep them faithful to their new allies. And albeit the father himself was full of other thoughts and purposes, he heard all that Tonty said with attention, and was ready to strive to do his best for La Salle in this matter.

“But thou shalt not go alone,” said Tonty; “that were indeed to tempt Providence. A few sturdy and fearless comrades must go with you well supplied with arms and ammunition. I fear I must spare my two brave boys for this; I can see they are aching for the adventure. Our larder is filled with meat. Food will become more plentiful week by week now. I must send Gaspard, and Claude, and Swanalulu at least—and that will be few enough for what lies before you, if this maiden’s fears be true.”

It was with a beating heart and eyes that glowed with joy that Gaspard heard the decision of their deputy-leader. His whole heart was bent upon this new adventure, and now that Father Fritz was also to take part in it, his satisfaction was complete.

The news of what was happening spread like wild-

fire through the camp, and caused the greatest excitement there. Most of the men far preferred the shelter of their wooden walls to the thought of a fierce onslaught from the Sioux; but there were some bold spirits who longed to be of the number to go forth to the Green Valley, and amongst these was Louis Dautray, the cousin of Gaspard and Claude.

“There is nought to keep me here,” he cried to Gaspard; “the forge and anvil work is wellnigh done. We have hammered the bolts and nails needed for the ship. We have nearly exhausted our slender store of iron. My father could accomplish all the rest of the work alone. Would that I might go forth with you to the Green Valley, and wield my weapons against the Indian foe!”

In fact, so eager did Louis become, that he made his appeal to Tonty himself, and obtained permission to accompany the little band, on the condition that he should be willing to return if he received orders to do so through some Indian messenger sent to convey them.

A large canoe was to convey the party down to the Green Valley—a canoe well provided with weapons and ammunition, of which the fort had a large stock, considering its diminished numbers. Tonty was not sorry to make, as it were, an arsenal in some other place. He was very doubtful as to the constancy and faithfulness of some of his men, and thought it no bad move to send off a large consignment to safer quarters elsewhere. Father Fritz was in command of the party, and was

entrusted with the responsibility of the enterprise. Tonty begged him to remain in the Green Valley, the friend and ally of La Salle, until that leader should return from his journey, and visit it in person.

These preliminaries being settled, the canoe, with its heavy load and its six white and two dark-skinned occupants—for Tessouat was to go to the valley and return to the fort with news of the safe arrival of the party—pushed off into the swollen waters of the Illinois, and the men in the fort fired a parting salute, which was answered by a hearty English cheer from Gaspard and Claude, and then the little frail bark slid rapidly down the river, and was lost to view behind the trees of the forest.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN VALLEY.

THE Green Valley! It lay before them like a verdant basin—a circular hollow lying amongst rolling hills. It was just the place for a home and a settlement, watered by a trickling stream, and surrounded by fertile meadows and the sloping sides of the hills. Fine timber trees surrounded it on every side, and gave shelter and shade to the little village clustering in the hollow. The houses were strongly built of timber, and thickly thatched with reeds from the river. The gardens were divided by neat fences, and in them bloomed many a gay spring flower such as the boys had not seen since leaving England.

Indeed the whole place wore so much the air of a peaceful English village that Gaspard's eyes gleamed with a sudden sense of joy, and grasping Mayflower's hand in his, he whispered,—

“I never thought to see again a place that looked so like home; I could indeed love a home such as that!”

There was only one easy way of entrance into the

cup-like hollow, and that was through the little ravine which ran from the great river up into the country beyond, and through which the streamlet trickled after it had watered the Green Valley itself.

Louis Dautray, who had much of the soldier in him, looked narrowly about him as they moved along the narrow path. It seemed to him that if that pathway could be held against the advancing foe, they would hardly care to scale the hills and advance upon them over their lofty crests. Indians could do it, doubtless; but it would be tedious and troublesome, and they would be a ready prey for the marksmen of the valley as they crossed the open spaces of cultivated land.

The little colony had been well placed for self-protection by the original settlers; but it seemed at the present moment as though the martial spirit had been exchanged for one of a somewhat fatalistic pietism, such as not unfrequently falls upon a decaying race.

That, indeed, was the idea which Father Fritz had received in the first instance, and further talks with the frank and fearless pair on the voyage had intensified this opinion.

“A dozen stout-hearted French and English men well armed, and with plenty of powder and lead, ought to hold this valley against a whole horde of savages,” cried Louis, eagerly; and Mary flashed him a grateful smile as she replied,—

“My brothers will fight shoulder to shoulder with you, and there be some others besides who will follow

them. It is because we have so few young men amongst us now, and the old men are averse to fighting, that the peril is so sore. But if our white brothers come to our aid, then indeed all will take courage!"

Suddenly there burst upon them from the thicket a graceful, fawn-like creature, with a clear olive skin, eyes as dark as night, and a cloud of dusky hair falling like a mantle over her shoulders. She was dressed in European fashion, yet there must have been Indian blood in her veins, for there was something in all her movements which suggested the lithe grace of the untamed child of the woods, and though her speech was pure and clear, there was the soft sibilant intonation which betokened just a strain of the native race. But she was strangely beautiful, and instinct with an activity and sylph-like grace that is never seen amongst Indian girls themselves. She sprang from the thicket in which she had been watching, with a little cry of pure rapture, and flung herself into the arms of Mary with an abandonment of joy.

"Darling!—darling!—darling! Ah, how I have hungered and feared for thee. And thou hast really accomplished the great deed! Thou hast brought deliverers to us in our extremity. Ah! indeed, ye are not too soon. They say the fierce Sioux are close at hand. We cannot sleep at night for fear we should be awakened by their hideous war-whoop! Are these men our brave brethren and deliverers come to help us?"

At that question, Louis, who had been gazing with mute admiration at the dark-skinned girl, took off his cap and advanced with a courtly grace.

“We have indeed come with intent to save you, and if that may not be, we can but die for and with you. But we have had many dealings with Indians of all kinds in these wilds, and methinks we shall not fail here, having succeeded so well heretofore.”

The dark-eyed girl looked eagerly at him, and answered softly in the French tongue. Mary presented her to Father Fritz and the little band as her foster-sister Ruvanni. She had been found in the forest a tiny, helpless babe, about whom nothing was known, and being just the same age as Mary, had been taken by Mary's mother and brought up as her own child; but the semi-Indian name had been given to her, as at first she was taken for an Indian child, although soon it became evident that she was far more European than Indian.

Whilst all this was going on, the party was approaching the little settlement, and the moment their advance was noted from there, it was hailed by a wondering shout: women ran out of the houses exclaiming in amaze, whilst the few young men who were at work in the fields, sowing the spring corn, threw down their implements, and ran forward to meet the new-comers.

For a moment there was such confusion of voices, rapid talking in French and English, explanations, eager questions, quick replies, that no further progress could

be made. But when the settlers understood that these were a part of La Salle's exploring party, and had come with arms and ammunition to aid them against the onslaught of the Sioux, and to become their friends and allies, there was nothing but the warmest of welcomes for them, and they were escorted in a sort of triumph down the steep declivity which led direct to the homesteads of this strange little colony, and ushered with some small pomp into the presence of the Patriarch himself.

His house was the most important in the place. It was beautiful, clean, and home-like, austere plain, yet not without a charm of its own. It was such an abode as the travellers had not seen since they left the shores of Europe, as unlike the buildings of Quebec and Montreal as it was to the huts and wigwams of the Indians. The snowy-headed old man, who looked exceedingly aged, though in reality not above seventy-five years, received them with a grave courtesy. He would not commit himself to any opinion for a considerable time, but ordered food to be set before the guests, and questioned them and his grandchildren somewhat closely before himself pronouncing any judgment upon what was to be done. His face indeed was somewhat stern and irresponsive at first, although the young men standing silent in the background exchanged glances of unmixed approval and satisfaction, and showed every eagerness for the proposed plan of defence. It was not until Father Fritz spoke, and

pointed out in his clear and spiritual way that the servants and children of the Most High God must guard as a precious gift from Him the life which He had bestowed, and not throw it away in the wilderness through slothfulness or timidity, that the countenance of the old man unbent, and he looked with a more friendly and benignant glance upon the strangers.

Father Fritz looked straight into the eyes of the Patriarch, his own kindling as he did so, and asked him if he truly believed it to be the will of God that His baptized children, sworn to His service, should be to all intents and purposes handed over to ferocious Indians to die a death of agony, not for the faith that was in them, nor to glorify God by any testimony, but simply to glut the fiendish rage of men who, when roused to frenzy of war, were fiends rather than men? With stern piercing gaze he stretched out his hand towards the two beautiful girls clinging together and eagerly drinking in his words, and asked if those innocent and tender maidens were to be given over to the cruelty of the barbarous Indians.

Then the Patriarch replied that they had meant to strive and defend themselves, but had trusted mainly in the Lord for succour; and at that Father Fritz replied, with his wonderful beaming smile, that the Lord had indeed sent succour, but that His first law of human life was that men were to strive, and to fight, and to battle with the enemy themselves, whether that enemy came to them in the form of a spiritual

tempter, or as a carnal and fleshly foe to be overcome by force of arms. God would fight for His children; but they must fight for themselves. So it had been in days of old, and so it would be now. He had sent to their aid to-day. He had put it into the heart of the brave maiden to go in search of help. Now that that help had come, doubtless sent by God Himself, all must strive might and main to utilize it and employ it to the best advantage. That was doing the will of God, not sitting down to pray to Him without using those means to the utmost which He has provided.

And at these words a murmur of approval ran round the assembly. The old men, who had sunk into a species of pious fatalism, were roused by this appeal to see things in a nobler light; whilst the few young men, who had always been on the side of organized resistance, broke into open exclamations of approval, and at once a new spirit seemed to energize the whole colony.

Whilst Father Fritz remained for the present with the Patriarch and his friends, finding passages and precedents in the Word of God for such times of need, the rest filed out of the house, and eagerly began a consultation with their allies as to the best fashion of fortifying themselves against the expected attack.

Louis Dautray at once took the lead. He pointed out to the men the half-filled-up ditch or moat which had once surrounded their houses. He set the strongest of the party to work at once, in clearing out and

deepening it. There was a quantity of wood—solid beams sawn out ready for building purposes—stacked in piles not far away. Louis at once ordered a palisade to be erected within the ditch, which would prove a valuable rampart of defence if the valley itself should be invaded. The timber was both arrow and musket proof, and a small garrison could easily protect itself within those stout walls.

But Louis meant, if possible, to keep the enemy altogether out of the valley itself. As has been said before, this spot had been very well chosen by the original settlers, and was surrounded by high hills, the farther sides of which were precipitous and not easy to be scaled. Through the little ravine whence the stream found its way to the broad tide of the Mississippi, was the only real opening through which any sort of army could find a way; and just before the valley was reached, this ravine narrowed and passed through a rocky aperture, which could be easily barred by a strong rampart, and guarded from above and behind.

But first the heavy contents of the canoe lying hidden in a bed of reeds, under the charge of Tessouat, must be transported hither, and for that office the girls and women eagerly volunteered. Leaving the men hard at work over the building of the ramparts, Mayflower, hand in hand with Ruvanni, led the way along the gorge and down to the canoe, and when once there the women and girls loaded themselves with arms and ammunition, and came toiling back again, singing a

triumphal hymn as they did so, and piling their loads within the palisade, now rapidly rising, whilst they set forth with undiminished cheerfulness for another.

And now they had many helpers; for the friendly Indians of the neighbouring villages, who were also in deadly fear of the invasion threatened by the fierce Sioux, came flocking down at the news that the servants of the great Onontio had arrived, and that the enemy was to be met and driven backwards. So long as the white men were despondent and unready, they had held aloof from them, but the sight of these preparations filled them with ardour, and the work went forward as if by magic.

And indeed it was none too soon, for flying scouts from the forest beyond came in at sunset with the news that the Sioux were close at hand. They had encamped themselves for the night in a valley only about two miles distant, and were holding one of their savage orgies, such as was the usual harbinger of a battle.

But thanks to the skill and willingness of their Indian friends, combined with the hardy labour of the French and English, the fortifications were almost completed ere the sun sank, and the men toiled on with undiminished energy by the white light of the moon.

There was no fear of attack that night. The Sioux were engrossed in their unholy rites, singing, dancing, working themselves up into mad frenzy by their own devices, and would certainly not be ready to move

before morning. Scouts had been posted to give warning of attack, and the frightened Indian squaws, children, and girls had been permitted to shelter themselves within the palisade round the buildings, where a great barn, now almost empty, had been allotted to them as quarters.

A few hours of rest the little garrison was able to obtain, when the work was completed to the satisfaction of Louis and Gaspard, and had been approvingly examined by Father Fritz and the Patriarch. The Dautray boys were surprised to find how much Father Fritz knew about such matters as building and fortifying. He had given them many most valuable hints during their operations, and had shown a sagacity and astuteness in placing the peep-holes for the guns, and settling the arrangement of the garrison which had astonished Louis, who had an idea that friars and men of religion had scant knowledge of such matters as these. Father Fritz smiled a little as the youth once spoke his surprise, and his answer was one which gave all who heard it food for reflection afterwards.

“My son, if the great God of heaven and earth—who is the God of battles as well as the Prince of Peace—looks down with infinite interest upon every occupation which can engross His children, it is our duty and our privilege to observe and to study *everything* that comes at any time beneath our ken. God may have sent us the opportunity for some purpose of His own. If we neglect that opportunity the fault

is ours, and the responsibility ours when, in days to come, we need that very item of knowledge which we let slip by us carelessly when we might have made it ours."

Gaspard listened, and his face grew deeply thoughtful. Now he began to understand something of the reason for that marvellous faculty of observation which he had observed from the first in Father Fritz. Had not his knowledge of herbs saved many lives in the Indian village, and that of La Salle himself? had not his careful study of Indian character been the safety of himself and others on many occasions? And now, had not his keen powers of reasoning and observation shown them all just the weakest places in their own defences, and pointed out the best means of remedying them?

The night passed in silence and in sleep after toil. With the first of the dawn the camp was astir, and all assembled together to hear the Patriarch read aloud a stirring chapter from the Book of Joshua, and to listen to a brief but earnest prayer from Father Fritz.

Hardly had these exercises been finished before a breathless scout came rushing in to say that the Sioux had broken up their camp, and were in full march for the valley, whooping and yelling, and evincing every mark of savage fury.

The Indian women and children screamed and ran into the shelter of their barn. The cheeks of the white girls and women paled slightly, but none either

trembled or flinched. Gaspard was to command the garrison on the inside of the palisade, which consisted chiefly of Indians, and the old men, who could fire steadily from their loopholes, but not move actively in open ground. Louis was in command of the outer rampart across the mouth of the ravine, and of the small body of settlers able and willing to be posted in the more open and dangerous situation. It had been thought best to give the command to the visitors—the youths of La Salle's party—to avoid jealousies and emulations. Also their recent life had engendered in the lads quickness of decision and readiness of action, and they had seen enough of peril to be cool and fearless in the midst of it.

Mary Neville, who had been one of the hardest workers amongst the girls and women, came up to Gaspard with a fearless light in her eyes, as he stood upon the little platform erected for him, which gave him a view of the whole of his enclosure.

“Let me stand here and load your pieces for you,” she said; “I can do that, and save your time. I am not frightened at the sound of guns. Let me be near you and help you.”

Gaspard leaped down and took her hand in his.

“You will be safer within the walls of the house, *Mayflower*,” he said tenderly.

“But I do not wish for safety whilst our brave men—whilst you—are in peril. Let me stay here with you. I shall be happier so.”

With a sudden impulse of tender joy Gaspard carried the little hand he held to his lips, and kissed it thrice.

“Stay, then, here beside me, my Mayflower,” he said ; “but promise me first that, if I order thee within the walls, thou wilt go without a murmur.”

She looked at him with a world of tender, wistful love in her child-like eyes, and answered simply,—

“I promise.”

Then a sudden silence fell between them and over the whole valley, for in the distance could be heard the wild war-whoops and yells of an advancing host, and the scouts posted along the sides of the ravine came rushing back with the news that the great band of Indian warriors, in full war-paint and feathers, brandishing their weapons and excited to the highest pitch of savage fury, were advancing along the ravine, ready to fall upon the inhabitants of the Green Valley and exterminate them.

“Steady, men, steady !” cried Gaspard to those within. “Reserve your fire, whatever you may see, till I give the word !”

“Steady, men, steady !” Louis’s voice was heard trumpet-like above. “Keep close hidden in your ambushments till the first man mounts the barricade. Then each man pick off in turn those that leap within it. Never mind the mass without. Deal only with those within. Let not one of them escape. But silence now—and watchfulness !”

The tone and manner of the young general commanded confidence and respect. The Indians, who had wavered and seemed disposed to scatter in panic (for let it be borne in mind that these Illinois tribes of this part of the country were the least fierce and warlike of any of the Indians of North America) at the first sound of their approaching foes, now regained their courage, and gathered together at the appointed spots, some armed with muskets, but more with bows and arrows or tomahawks, ready to obey the fearless white man, and to trust in his power to save them.

The yelling and terrible war-whoops came nearer and nearer. All was so silent and still that the Sioux plainly believed themselves masters of the situation already. The white men had either fled, or were cowering like rabbits in their burrows. To burn and steal and slay would be the delightful task of the conquerors.

Suddenly they turned a corner of the rocky path, and saw the barrier raised in front of them. That pulled them up short for a moment. That looked like resistance. But all was perfectly still and silent. Not even the keen eyes of the Indians could detect one of the men lying hidden in the cleverly arranged ambushes. After a brief parley with each other one of the chiefs gave the word, and in a moment a dozen painted savages were swarming over the barricade.

“Bang!—bang!—bang!”

The dusky forms the moment before carelessly swinging over the rampart now lay wallowing in their blood upon the other side. Not a man of the whole number rose to his feet; all lay dead or dying in the dust. This indeed was a reception not expected. The war-whoop of triumph died away, though savage yells of execration rent the air.

Again came a pause for consultation. And then a far more furious and determined onrush. Instead of a dozen, there were a hundred men flinging themselves against and upon the rampart. And now came the moment when Louis's contingent could not cope with the rush of Indians over the barrier, and Gaspard gave his command.

"Every man that comes within range of the palisade shall be shot down by the gun nearest to him. Steady, boys, steady. This will not last. Pick your men, and keep cool and steady. Yon fellow is mine. I will give you the lead."

Although Louis and his party were firing as rapidly as possible, and the ground was covered with slain, yet the numbers behind kept pressing on, and already there were many savage painted Sioux warriors who had succeeded in getting through that first peril safely, and were now forming up to fling themselves into the fort, doubtless hoping that the bulk of the enemy were posted above the first rampart, where such slaughter had been done.

But at once a dozen ringing shots from within the

palisade told them a different tale. Gaspard and his veterans fired with steady rapidity and accuracy. The oncoming ranks were decimated by the first volley. At the second, they paused and wavered; at the third, they scattered and fled.

The friendly Indians, who had hitherto watched tremblingly the fortunes of the day, now rushed headlong down the heights, and fell with their tomahawks upon the wavering and discomfited foe. They spared none in their furious onslaught, and would have set about scalping the living with the dead, had not Father Fritz advanced, bearing the peace-pipe, and making his way to the rampart without, where the remaining mass of the foe stood wavering and uncertain, and he commanded the friendly savages to desist from their hideous vengeance, in tones so full of benignant authority, that they submitted almost without a murmur.

The victory was practically won. Father Fritz, if once he could obtain a hearing, was certain to impose his will upon the discomfited and leaderless Sioux—for almost all their notable chiefs had been slain in this furious attack and repulse. But yet the day would have been one of mourning and loss for the little camp had it not been for the courage and watchfulness of Ruvanni.

Unknown to all, she had slipped from the enclosure where all the girls and women had sheltered, and had posted herself in a hollow tree—a secret haunt of hers—near to the spot which Louis had chosen as his own

especial coign of vantage. Here, with her bright dark eyes fixed full upon him, she had marked every order and seen every turn of the battle, her heart swelling within her in pride and joy.

But even as Father Fritz advanced to hold parley, with the calumet in his hand, she heard a snake-like movement in the grass beside her, and became suddenly aware that a bold young Sioux chieftain and a score of hardy followers had crept up the rocky sides of the ravine, and were now creeping with cat-like steps upon Louis, who stood openly on a knoll, watching the events below, scarcely even on his guard. It was plain what was intended. These fierce men would make a sudden rush upon him, would overcome and bind him hand and foot ere any could come to his aid, and would carry him off rapidly and secretly into the depths of the forest, where they would put him to a death of unspeakable agony, during which they would seek to wreak upon him all the vengeance due for the defeat and slaughter of their tribe.

And what could one helpless girl do against a score of these warriors? The blood left her cheek and her lips for an instant—but only for one. The next moment with a wild shriek she had sprung downwards to the knoll where Louis stood, and seizing his musket, turned it full upon the advancing chieftain and shot him to the heart.

Louis, roused in a second, and at once seeing and understanding the imminent peril in which he had stood,

snatched the weapon from the now trembling hands of Ruvanni, and levelled it at the first of the dusky train, all of whom had started to their feet at the girl's cry. Gaspard, hearing the shots above, and realizing in a moment what had happened, made an upward rush at the head of a small band of his countrymen. The Indians, their chief killed, their hope of prey snatched from them, uttered a wild cry and fled the way they had come; whilst Ruvanni, who had been shaking like an aspen and clinging to a sapling that stood near, suddenly collapsed as Gaspard and his band dashed up, and would have fallen to the ground had not Louis caught her in his arms exclaiming,—

“Ruvanni! sweetheart! I owe thee my life!”

CHAPTER XIII.

EVIL TIDINGS.

THE victory was won. But it was not yet assured. The Indians had been checked and baffled, but it by no means followed that they would consider themselves beaten. The party in the Green Valley was very small as compared with the multitudes of painted warriors swarming upon the hills outside, thirsting for vengeance upon those who had slain their brethren. Yet so many of their best and bravest chiefs had been killed during that fierce onset, that the savages hesitated about attacking the white settlers a second time. They had begun to feel a great dread of their occult powers. They hung about the neighbourhood, and showed themselves here and there; but no attack was made upon the fortified village, and though great vigilance was necessary there, its inhabitants were left unmolested.

Then Father Fritz came forward and offered to attempt mediation. He had no fears for his life in adventuring amidst the savage Indians, for he went forth in a strength stronger than any which could be brought to bear against him. His calm and dignified mien, his quiet fearlessness, and his unspeakable gentleness and

kindliness, always won upon the fierce yet susceptible natures of the Indians. To and fro he went between the Green Valley and their camps, and each time he returned in safety, and with better news.

The Sioux warriors were disarmed by his benignity. They listened with eager attention to his talk. They began to believe that the white men could be their friends, and to desire an alliance with them. They spoke eagerly of the pleasant lands farther south, and the rich and fertile tracts of country only waiting, as it were, for the advent of the white conqueror. Why should not these Frenchmen come and settle there, and teach their arts and their religion to the Indian tribes along the banks of the great river, which might be made the highway of all the trade of the vast continent? Something of the purpose of La Salle had found its way to the ears of most of the Indian tribes. Some of them it filled with fear and fury, but there were others who were eager to welcome and form alliance with the white conquerors; and intercourse with Father Fritz almost invariably ended in an eager desire on the part of the Indians for the friendship of the wonderful strangers from over the great sea.

Soon the painted warriors began to pay friendly visits to the Green Valley, and to hold amicable converse with its inhabitants. More than this, a party of Shawanoes found their way thither, and amongst them were a few Natches and Oumes from the extreme south, and all joined together to tell one tale.

They had heard flying rumours respecting the coming of the white men. They had been told that wherever they came they conquered all before them, and that great and wonderful cities sprang up like magic in their path. Some had heard of the wonders of Montreal and Quebec, and desired to see their own land enriched by palaces and mighty buildings. Why should all the trade and the riches of the land be drawn away by the great waterways of the north? Why should not their own mighty river become a highway of wealth equal to that of Canada? The Indians were astute enough to appreciate the value of white settlers along their giant river; and though jealousy and fear often conquered all other feelings, yet the desire to share in the advantages which had accrued to their dusky brethren of the north, by trading with the white man, impelled them to desire his presence amongst them.

With this trading question Father Fritz had nothing to do. His mission was to seek to bring the light of the gospel to shine upon the darkness of their heathen hearts. But there were others in the camp willing and eager to discuss this question; and Louis Dautray kindled into enthusiasm as he spoke of La Salle and his project, and invited certain of the Indian chiefs to pay a visit to Fort Crêvecœur themselves, and have an interview with Lieutenant Tonty upon that very subject.

This, however, seemed to them superfluous, and they preferred to deal with those persons in the Green Valley with whom they had established friendly terms.

“Why should not that small colony remove itself farther south, and become a colony of pioneers ready for La Salle when he should accomplish his mission, and navigate the great river to its mouth?” asked the Indian warriors. “Why wait longer here, in peril of the threatened invasion of the Iroquois, which would certainly not be much longer delayed? Had the white men not heard of the deadly jealousy of the Iroquois towards the Illinois and all the southern tribes? If they had not, they soon would, and then, perhaps, it might be too late. Better be warned now; better break up their camp and remove at leisure, than wait to be slain and see their lands devastated by the fiercest and most relentless of all the Indians of the north.”

And then, on being more closely questioned as to the meaning of this saying, the Indian chiefs explained the matter more fully.

Hitherto the Iroquois had considered themselves the chief gainers through the advent of the white man to Canada. They supplied him with beaver skins and other furs, and received in exchange arms and spirits and tobacco. Now, however, they had heard with indignation and dismay that a new field of enterprise was to be opened, and that the Illinois, their rivals and hated enemies, were to be enriched at their expense, and the trade of the upper rivers diverted down the broad stream of the Mississippi, far away from their land, and where no good would accrue from it to them.

Always ready for a brush with their rivals, and now

goaded to fury by believing themselves outwitted by their less warlike foes, they were preparing for an invasion of the enemy's country on a scale altogether larger and more important than anything which had been yet attempted. It might probably end in the almost complete extermination of the Illinois, and none of their white friends and allies would be spared. If the occupants of the Green Valley were once discovered, they would most certainly be slaughtered to a man.

This was very disquieting news, not only for the Patriarch and the little colony itself, but for the Dau-trays and Father Fritz. That the story told by the Indians was true in the main they could not doubt. Swanalulu had heard the same from other quarters, and the thing was too probable to be disbelieved. The attack might not be made immediately, but probably would not be delayed longer than the autumn of the present year. Would La Salle have returned with reinforcements by that time, and have passed beyond this threatened country? Or was it possible that he and his followers would become involved in the general massacre that would certainly follow a great Iroquois victory?

"The captain ought to know this," said Gaspard, when the matter was fully made known to those at the Green Valley. "What say you, friends? shall I go back and tell him what has befallen us, and take him the news of what may be expected? If we have to

hold Fort Crêvecœur against all the hordes of the Iroquois, we must needs strengthen our defences. How thinkest thou, Louis? Would the men of Green Valley be willing to join forces with us there? If they would, we should be a goodly band, and could make a gallant show for the general when he returns."

Louis, however, shook his head doubtfully.

"I misdoubt me if it would answer. These men have been too long their own masters to take kindly to the rule of a camp like ours, and we have already too many disaffected ones to desire to add more to their numbers. Let them settle their own affairs in their own way. They are weary of the Green Valley. That is very plain. Already some talk of going to Canada, and settling amongst their countrymen in Quebec or Montreal. They are aweary of the sway of the Patriarch, and having heard of life in other places, have a thirst to seek it for themselves. Let them go their own way. We can charge them with messages for La Salle, and let him know what has happened and is like to happen here. But if they desire not to join with us, I would not ask it of them. They are brave fellows enough, but they are somewhat too like savages themselves. I would let them go their own way. La Salle is not the master that all care to serve."

This was only too true. Those who loved him best, best knew how little he was able to endear himself to the majority of his followers. Gaspard sighed and said no more; but eagerly waited for some decision to be

made ere he returned to Fort Crêvecoeur with news for Tonty.

It was upon the very morning following that he was awakened from sleep by a quick, frightened cry in a voice that he well knew, and springing from his couch, and rushing out into the early morning sunshine, he beheld Mary Neville running out of the house with a white, scared face, down which the tears were coursing freely.

“What is it, Mayflower?” he cried anxiously, catching her by the hand, whilst a great sob burst from her.

“Alas! alas! My grandfather, my dear grandfather!” she cried, clinging to him and shaking like an aspen.

Gaspard placed his arm about her, and drew her towards the open door, whence came the sound of startled voices.

“He is quite dead,” said one. “Cold and stiff,” added another. “It must have happened in the night. He has been dead many hours,” added a third.

It was only too true. James Neville, the hoary Patriarch of that little community, had passed away in his sleep that very night, without warning of any kind. Perhaps the excitement of the past weeks had been too much for him. Perhaps a slight injury received during the fight had been more serious than was supposed. But the fact remained, he was gone; and the little colony, deprived of its head, was likely to dissolve itself into atoms, and break up like ice before the sun.

Father Fritz solemnly committed the remains of the old man to the earth upon the third day, and sincere was the mourning of those who had known and loved him, especially on the part of the few old men left, and of his grandchildren, who had grown up at his knee, and to whom he had always been a tender, though stern guardian.

Gaspard stood beside Mary at the open grave, and held her hand in his, and when she looked at him with streaming eyes, as at last they turned away, whispering below her breath, "There seems nobody now to care for us," he took her hands closely in his and whispered back,—

"Say not so, sweet Mayflower. Only give me the right to care for you and protect you against all dangers."

She gave him a shy, startled look. He hardly knew if she had understood him. He hardly knew what he himself meant to say. But he knew that from that moment life had somehow changed for him, and that life without Mary would never be life at all. She must always be bound up in the future with anything in which he was concerned.

Back from the little burial-ground of the community came the whole party. Many friendly Indians had watched with stolid reverence the funeral of the white man, much impressed, as it seemed, by the simple and touching ceremony. But they did not offer to return to the village with the mourners. Doubtless these

would have many things to discuss, and would wish to discuss them with closed doors.

In truth the death of the Patriarch had made a vast difference in the feelings of many of his "children," as he had been wont to call them. It seemed like a break up of the old life, and practically settled the question of the abandonment of the Green Valley. There was nobody to take the place of the departed Neville. None desired the office of Patriarch, nor were the young men disposed to obey another ruler.

The old men had had enough of the wilderness and of fighting with the Indians. In face of this anticipated invasion of the Iroquois, they had quite decided to abandon their homes, and seek the shelter of the cities which had sprung up since they were young. They and their wives and families would wait for a short time until the season should be a little more advanced, and then they would journey under the protection of some of their Indian allies back to the regions of civilization. They would take up seigniories along the river St. Lawrence, where land was granted to settlers, and every help and inducement held out to them to colonize the country. Their past life fitted them well for this, and they were likely to thrive and succeed. They had had enough of peril and adventure. Something more safe and civilized was of greater attraction to them now.

But there were others in the small community whose views were widely different from this.

Louis Dautray listened with sparkling eyes whilst

the elder members spoke, and when they had done, and those who agreed with them had gathered together at one side of the large room where they had met for discussion, he sprang to his feet and addressed the remainder with eager impetuosity.

“But what shall the rest of you do? Will all return to the cold lands of the north, whilst the great and fertile south lies, as it were, awaiting us with open arms? It is well, doubtless, for those whose meridian has passed to return to their countrymen and to the haunts of peace and plenty. But shall the world be conquered and discovered thus? Shall none of us be found willing to adventure ourselves to be the first in the great work which lies before us? Friends, ye do all know for what purpose the *Sieur de la Salle* has set forth into these wilds. I need speak no more particularly of that. Let me speak but of that thought which has come into my mind. Will ye give me a hearing whilst I unburden myself to you?”

“We will! we will!” cried the young men eagerly. These had not sided with the party who desired to return to civilization, and they mustered some dozen of hardy fellows, English, Scotch, and French by nationality, though now much mixed in blood through the intermarriages which had taken place in the little community. Amongst these were the three brothers of *Mary Neville*, and a few women, the wives of some amongst the younger men, with their young children. *Mary Neville* and *Ruvanni* stood clinging together in

the background, eagerly listening to every word that passed, their eyes fixed on the face of the speakers, and their slim frames palpitating with excitement and eagerness.

Then Louis spoke once again, in clear and rapid tones. He had been formulating his scheme for some time. He had taken counsel, indeed, with Father Fritz and with one or two of the bolder hearted amongst the men, and now he spoke like one who knows well what he has to propose, and how he means to carry out his plan.

His idea was this: that he, together with all those who were willing to accompany him, should act the part of pioneers down the great river, and go as the vanguard of the expedition which would presently follow. The *Sieur de la Salle* might have many difficulties to overcome. Troubles beset him on every side. He was absent now, and none knew when he would return. But why should valuable time be lost? The Indians were friendly. They desired to see white men on their coasts. The lands of the south were full of fertile plains and valleys more green and smiling than this. Why should they not go forth and found a fresh colony there, ready to welcome the great explorer when he should come? Were they not all young and strong and full of courage? Why should they tarry longer, and lose, perhaps, the favourable moment for the attempt? They had with them men and women of good lives and repute, and of courage and endurance.

They had a holy man of God, who would doubtless go with them, and bring God's blessing with him. The Sieur de la Salle had his friars to accompany him, and to strive to convert the heathen Indian to the faith of Christ. If Father Fritz would go with them, they would carry the message of peace and good-will to the land whither they should go. And having founded for themselves a young colony, like to the one which had had a home so long in the Green Valley, they would be in a position to assist the great explorer when he should come on his way, and to form the nucleus of a little centre of civilization and trade when the time for the great enterprise should have come.

Such was the gist of Louis's speech, and it made its mark instantly. It was something definite and feasible to attempt. It gave present occupation and interest, and the possibility of a golden future. The Indians were ready to escort them. They were full of friendly promises. They were eager to see the advent of white men in their midst. Men and women alike were inured to the hardships of a life in the wilderness, and down in the sunny south these hardships would be greatly mitigated. They could found a little colony in some favourable spot. They could make friends with the Indians, who were far less fierce, if they were not less treacherous, than those of the north, and they could carry the news of salvation with them as they went; this being invariably the pious accompaniment of any exploring enterprise in those days.

Eagerly did they press round Louis, tendering their services to him, as though he were their leader. Eagerly did they press round Father Fritz, begging him to accompany them. This he was ready to do. For the moment there was nothing further for him amongst La Salle's men. He did not actually belong to that expedition, and he had observed that his greater success in dealing with the Indians had awakened a little jealousy in the breasts of the friars. They might prefer to be rid of him. He might be wanted more here. Moreover he had heard from the Sioux that Father Hennepin was a captive amongst their tribes, not ill treated, but still in some danger. If he accompanied this party he might see his way to effecting his rescue, and for the moment this appeared to be the most pressing need.

"My friends, I will go with you," he said; "it may be that the Lord has given us this thing to do. We must go forth not to enrich ourselves, not merely to win empty fame and glory, but to seek to do His will, and to bring the light of His truth wherever we go. If you will go forth in that spirit, I will go with you, and I think the Lord will be with us."

All assented willingly and eagerly. All were fired by zeal and piety. The influence of Father Fritz during these weeks had not been lost. They all had come to love and revere him, and to desire to show forth in their own lives some of the beauty of holiness which was so marked a feature in his.

"And, father, wilt thou do one thing for us ere we

start?" said Louis, leading forward the blushing Ruvanni by the hand. "We love each other. I owe my life to her. Make us man and wife ere we start forth into the wilderness. Then can we travel fearlessly and happily together; and Mary Neville can come with us, for she longs to do so. Her brothers are all going, and Ruvanni is as a sister; and she has no kindred left in the world but these."

And so before many days were over, Louis Dautray and the maiden Ruvanni were made man and wife by Father Fritz, and received his fatherly blessing on their union. The Indians danced and yelped with joy, and the building of canoes went merrily forward. The whole of the Green Valley seemed to have changed its character and to be alive with new forms of energy and industry; and only Gaspard went about with a grave and rather troubled face, till asked by Louis what the matter was, and whether he would not join their party.

"I would fain do so for many reasons," he answered; "but methinks my first duty is to the Sieur de la Salle. He needs stout hearts and faithful men about him. Thou canst well lead this expedition without me, and duty bids me return to the fort, at least for a while, to tell what has befallen, and to seek counsel of the captain. I doubt not that all will rejoice to think that some of our countrymen have gone forward to prepare the minds of the Indians for the coming of the greater expedition. But I feel that I must return to tell the news in person, and then let others decide whether I

rejoin you or remain with them. If our men were all true of heart I should not feel as I do. But there be so few that can be trusted, and it is ill work to be left in the desert with traitors."

Louis nodded his head in assent.

"Very true, very true. I would fain know myself how they are faring at the fort. Go thy ways then, good Gaspard. Thou art a trusty fellow, and worth thy weight in gold to any party. Perchance thou and Claude will be wanted there even more than we can want you. For my fellows all seem stanch enow, and their hearts are in the project, which is much more than can be said, I fear, for the men with our good Captain Tonty."

So whilst the preparations for the voyage down the river proceeded merrily forward, Gaspard and Claude prepared to return through the forest to Fort Crêvecœur, to learn what had happened there, and to bear tidings of what they had accomplished in Green Valley.

But just one day before they started there came in hot haste to the camp an Indian messenger, dispatched by Swanalulu, bringing evil tidings with him. And hardly had he delivered his message before Tessouat came up, with confirmation terrible and fearsome.

"The fort is destroyed! the fort is destroyed! The Sieur de Boisrondet is holding out against the mutineers almost single handed! They have risen against him. They are plundering and destroying. He has sent us in hot haste to see if we can bring help; but alas! alas! it will come too late!"

“The fort destroyed!” cried Gaspard, his face paling with astonishment and indignation. “Who has dared, who has dared to lay a finger upon it? Where is Captain Tonty? Why speak ye not of him? They have not slain him? surely they have not slain him?” and the youth’s voice grew hoarse with the anxiety which consumed him.

Tessouat shook his head reassuringly.

“He is not dead, at least not at Fort Crêvecœur. He is away. He received a message from the commander. What that message was I know not. It was brought by two men who had met the *Sieur de la Salle* upon his journey back. They brought a letter for the captain. And when he had read it, he chose out some few of the best men—thy father for one, and *Duplessis*, and others—and he set forth from the fort, leaving the *Sieur de Boisrondet* in command. As soon as he was gone an evil spirit seemed to possess the men. They gathered together in groups. They refused to work, and stood about muttering angrily and discontentedly together. The *Sieur de Boisrondet* was brave and cheerful, yet his heart was heavy within him, and we knew that mischief was in the air. Last night it broke out. The men rose and surrounded the blockhouse where the *Sieur* and the servant were sleeping. Could they have got in, they would doubtless have murdered them, but the doors were shut fast, and it was plain that there was danger in attacking those within. Then in their wrath they set to destroying the fort, and the

Sieur called from the window, and bade me fly like an arrow from the bow, and bring word of what was passing to you. I have come as fast as canoe may speed down these deep waters, but, alas! I fear already I come too late. They were making but short work of the fort. Fire and axe were laid against it. Doubtless ere now it lies a waste, and the destroyers have fled with such spoil as they can lay hands upon to the woods. But if you will return with me, I will lead you safely back. It may be that the Sieur de Boisrondet has escaped with life. He had arms and ammunition, and his heart is brave and firm. They feared to go within range of his windows. But they may have burned the whole place about his ears in their senseless fury."

This was in substance the dread tale which the Indian had to tell, though he spoke it not all at once, but bit by bit, interrupted by innumerable questions and exclamations. The reason for this sudden mutiny of malcontents was unknown to him. It seemed to have sprung up since the visit of La Salle's messengers, who had been the cause of the departure of Tonty. Why he had left the fort Tessouat could not say. He believed he was expected back; but meantime the timorous and discontented men left behind there, without any authorized head, had risen either in despair or in despite, and it seemed as though already La Salle's laborious toil had been destroyed in a single night.

Gaspard hesitated not a moment.

"I return with you this very instant," he said.

“Claude, thou wilt come with me. We and these two faithful Indians may yet accomplish something, if it be not already too late. Louis may not now change his plans. They are too far fixed now; but thou and I are free. I fear me it may be too late to accomplish much; but we must at least go back and see what lies before us. If all is over, and there is no trace of our comrades, we can but return hither and join this party for the south; but Heaven grant we may find our brethren alive and safe!”

A brief and earnest colloquy followed; but Gaspard's scheme was the one decided upon. It was something of a forlorn hope even now to return to the fort, destroyed and dismantled by mutinous hands, but help must be sent to the brave young Boisrondet. The canoe which Tessouat had brought down would hold four persons, and the vigorous Indians would be able to paddle it against the stream with greater rapidity than the party could cover the distance on foot. The river was no longer in flood, and they might hope to reach the fort upon the morrow.

Louis was all on fire to return, but his duty to the other party restrained him. Father Fritz was of opinion that it would be better to send Gaspard and Claude on in advance at least, and let them send word by Tessouat if they needed further help. It began to appear to many that the present expedition of La Salle was hopelessly broken up and scattered, and that until he returned with reinforcements nothing could be done.

Therefore there was more reason to expedite this little pioneer colony bound for the south, which might be of infinite service to La Salle in days to come. The men from the Green Valley would never submit to the harsh and somewhat tyrannical rule of La Salle. It was better they should act independently, and await him with friendly eagerness upon his arrival at last, than grow weary and mutinous as others had done who served in his company.

The Dautrays listened with conviction to these words, and Louis bade his cousins an affectionate farewell, hoping for a speedy and happy meeting. Mary's face was very white, but it was brave and calm as she said her last farewell to Gaspard.

"Go where duty calls thee, beloved," she whispered. "I shall think of thee and pray for thee every day. And we shall wait and watch always, and trust that thou wilt come again!"

Gaspard held her in his arms, and felt his eyes growing dim with unaccustomed tears. Then he gently placed her between Louis and Ruvanni.

"Take care of her," he said, hoarsely, "take care of her, till I come to claim her."

Then bending his knee for a moment to receive a blessing from Father Fritz, he sprang into the waiting canoe beside Claude, and the next moment the flashing paddles were driving clouds of spray along the surface of the shining river, as the canoe sprang along its upward course.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAYS OF PERIL.

“GASPARD!—Claude! Is it truly you I see? Now welcome, good friends, to our demolished fortress! Would that ye had come in time to save it; and yet I fear that nothing could have saved it or us. For when men turn themselves into savages, what hope is there for those who remain?”

It was the *Sieur de Boisrondet* who thus spoke, standing beside the river bank, and stretching out a warm grasp of welcome to each youth as he bounded ashore. The brave young face was pinched and drawn. He looked like a man who had been through much peril and anxiety of mind. As he spoke, he pointed significantly to the unfinished vessel lying upon the stocks close beside the river, where it was soon to have been launched; and upon one of the planks, written in great black letters, were the words,—

“NOUS SOMMES TOUS SAUVAGES.”*

The brothers looked in silence at the significant legend, and Gaspard asked,—

* We are all savages.

“Was that the doing of the mutineers?”

“Their last act before they fled to the woods, taking with them everything upon which they could lay hands that was portable — furs, provisions, stores of every kind. I and the friars and l’Espérance were left alone in the one blockhouse which we managed to secure and fortify and store for ourselves. Afterwards we were joined by Laurent and Messier, who were disgusted by the violence and savagery of their comrades, and preferred to throw in their lot with us. We are all that are left in the fort now, and that is scarce a shelter for us longer. We must leave it and seek Tonty, and bring to him the news of this fresh disaster. Verily this is but one chapter of accidents after the other! Was ever leader so unlucky before?”

“Where is Captain Tonty?” asked the brothers in a breath.

“Ah, that must I tell you whilst you are feeding and resting from your journey. And I must hear your story too. Doubtless we both have much to tell. It may not be safe to linger long in this place. We must seek to join our comrades on the morrow. But for the moment we will banish fear, and eat and drink and talk. Afterwards we must plan what is best to be done.”

The one blockhouse which was still standing was all that remained of Fort Crêvecœur, and even this was not in its former good condition, as fire and savage blows had left their marks upon it.

The two friars who were seated within gave a warm welcome to the lads, and listened eagerly to the news they brought from the Green Valley; but far more eager were the latter to hear than to tell, and soon they were seated at the table with food before them, whilst Boisrondet sat opposite to them and told his tale.

“It was a short while after you left that it began,” he said. “The longer the time was, the more discontented did the men appear to become, and I suppose the influence of Father Fritz was greater than any of us knew; for in his absence the mutterings of rebellion and anger increased from day to day. But the cheerful patience of our captain, and his friendliness with the men, kept them under control so long as he remained with us.”

“Tessouat spoke of his having gone,” said Gaspard quickly. “But what took him away?”

“That is what I am coming to. There arrived at the fort one day two of our countrymen, La Chapelle and Leblanc by name; and they brought with them a letter and much news from La Salle. The letter was to Tonty. In it La Salle told him of a certain rock he had seen a little higher up the river, near to the great Illinois town; and he was convinced that no better site could be found for the first of his proposed chain of fortresses along the course of the river than this place. He gave orders to Tonty to go and inspect it, and perhaps to commence the task of fortifying it; and although Tonty was somewhat loth to leave the fort here,

he was soldier enough to obey unhesitatingly the commands laid upon him by his superior; so he chose out a couple of men—your father and Duplessis—and one or two Indians, and went forth, the two messengers accompanying him, leaving the rest of us here with diminished party in the fort.”

“My father went with him!” spoke Gaspard, eagerly. “Then at least he had one faithful servant who would not desert him.”

“Yes, and of late Duplessis has shown himself faithful too. Perhaps it is the loss of these two which had a bad effect upon the rest. However that may be, there were other causes at work, although I did not know them then, which made the men ripe for mutiny.”

“What causes?” asked the brothers, breathlessly.

“Why, that is soon told. The messengers who brought the letter brought other things beside. They brought with them evil tidings; and these evil tidings they poured into the ears of the men, and they entered like poison into their veins. This we have learned since from Laurent and Messier. I knew it not when Tonty went and left me in charge of the fort.”

“What tidings?”

“Firstly, that the loss of the *Griffin* was now an assured fact. Secondly, that the whole country was very ill affected towards La Salle and his schemes, and that the Iroquois Indians were about to rise and wage unceasing warfare with all who attempted to divert the trade of the upper rivers from the old outlets at

Albany and along the St. Lawrence. Lastly, and worst, that La Salle himself was irretrievably ruined; that his lands and goods in different places had been seized upon by creditors; that he would never be able to pay any wages to those who served him, and that probably he would sooner or later desert them, and leave them to perish miserably in the wilderness by famine or at the hands of the Indians; that, in fact, his means and his honour were alike ruined, and not to be trusted by any."

Gaspard flushed angrily. Like all those who had come to trust and reverence La Salle, despite his coldness and sternness of bearing, the Dautray brothers were devoted body and soul to him and to the cause so near his heart, and resented with deep indignation any aspersions cast upon him by his detractors.

"The mean hounds!" hissed Gaspard between his teeth, "and pitiful cowards who believed them! Has he not given proof enough that, whilst his life lasts, he will never abandon the cause to which he is pledged?"

"True, but these fellows were half-hearted, and ripe for mutiny before. These tidings did but give them the impetus they had long been desiring. Perhaps we are even well rid of them. It is ill work living with traitors in the camp. The Indians are friendly. La Salle will return ere long with fresh men and the needful stores. Let us join Tonty, and keep together, a small but trusty band, till our leader returns to us."

It is something to feel that pioneers have gone down before us. It is much to know that the great river can be navigated to the mouth without perils greater than those already surmounted. We can afford to wait and be patient. To-morrow we will join forces with our captain, and take counsel with him. Methinks, after all, the loss of these discontented and mutinous fellows is no such grave misfortune !”

So spoke the brave young Boisrondet, his elastic spirits already rising, his resolve to see everything through rose-coloured spectacles standing him in good stead at this juncture. Gaspard and Claude, with the bright confidence of youth, fell at once into his way of thinking, and Father Gabriel himself, brave and cheery old man, applauded this view of the situation, and declared that they should soon see the turn of the tide now.

That night they slept in peace in the dismantled fort. The next morning they rose betimes, and after loading themselves with everything that remained to them, the forge and such tools as had escaped the plundering hands of the mutineers, they set themselves to track the footsteps of Tonty, and to join forces with him in some place which offered more security than the now demolished fort.

The Indians very well knew the rock which had been the goal of Tonty's expedition. “Starved Rock” was the name it went by in their parlance, and it was an object of considerable mark for some miles around. It

was possible that they might be able to entrench themselves there, and fortify the place in the manner suggested by La Salle. To find Tonty, however, was the first consideration, and that would best be done by sending the heavy goods up stream in one of the canoes, under the charge of the friars, two Frenchmen, and Swanalulu; whilst the rest of the party under the guidance of Tessouat, who had accompanied Tonty a part of the way before, should take the forest track, all agreeing to make the rendezvous at the base of the "Starved Rock."

It was pleasant travelling now through the green forest, bright with the tints of spring-tide. The ground was dry and easy to travel over, and there were meat and game in abundance. On the second day they came in sight of signs of Indian habitation.

In point of fact they came in sight of the great Illinois town which they had passed through before on their journeyings, and which had then been deserted. Now it was swarming with life. The tribe, returned from their winter hunting, had settled themselves in their habitations. The bulk of the warriors were absent, it is true, gone forth upon one of their interminable wars with other tribes. But there were plenty of young and old men left at home, and women and children innumerable. The town was capable of holding some eight thousand inhabitants, and probably there were quite six thousand Indians mustered there now.

But it was not the sight of this strange swarming community which first struck astonishment into the hearts of the little band suddenly advancing upon it from the shelter of the thick belt of trees, which had hitherto concealed the approach to it. It was not this that caused sudden exclamations of surprise and delight to escape from their lips. For upon emerging unexpectedly upon the wide prairie land, after traversing miles and miles of tangled forest, the first object that met the eyes of Gaspard, Boisrondet, and their companions, was a small group of white men standing upon a knoll only fifty yards distant, and making a careful survey from that vantage ground of the whole situation of the town and its environs.

“The captain! the captain!” shouted Gaspard, bounding forward like an arrow from a bow. At the sound of that cry the men wheeled round, and next minute Tonty was shaking hands warmly with Boisrondet and his companions, and was listening with grave and troubled face to the story of the devastation and loss of the luckless Fort Crêvecœur.

It was indeed a tale of woe; but Tonty was possessed of the true soldier spirit, which is not cast down by failure and defeat. To spend time and energy in useless lamentation over what was past was no part of his nature. With that they had no longer any concern. It was the future which lay before them. And now it behoved this gallant but diminished little band to consider seriously what they could do, left alone in this

wilderness amid thousands of partially friendly, and yet treacherous savages, who might upon small provocation be turned into deadly foes.

“How many are we?” asked Tonty, looking round upon the little band. “Thou, Boisrondet, who art as my right hand; Gaspard and Claude, both true to the core, as is also their father here”—and he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the elder Dautray with an expressive gesture of trust; “Duplessis yonder has served us trustily these last months; and you have the friars also, is it not so?”

“Father Gabriel and Father Zenobe are with us in the canoe,” answered Boisrondet, “and Laurent and Messier with them. These, with the Indians, Swanalulu and Tessouat, are all our party, and the servant l’Espérance, who has served us well and trustily.”

Tonty paused awhile in deep thought.

“It is hard to know, with so small a band, what it were best to do,” he said at length. “Let us sit here awhile, and you shall tell me all your tale. Then I must think what the next step should be, and how La Salle must be acquainted with these matters.”

The stories which we know were soon told, Tonty listening with close attention to all, and showing a lively interest in the fate of the colony of the Green Valley, and the projected enterprise of its emigrant inhabitants. He was almost disposed to regret that a junction with these sons of the wilderness had not been effected; but a little more talk with Gaspard convinced

him that only friction and perhaps mutiny would have been the result. The pioneers might succeed in their enterprise, in which case they would doubtless be helpful to La Salle when he arrived; or they might fail and perish, as many before them had done. In either case, it was better, perhaps, that they should take their own way and follow their own desires. Louis Daustray would not forget to forward the interests of La Salle in every way open to him.

As for himself, Tonty said that he had made a careful survey of the great rock overhanging the river just above the Illinois town. It was the very spot for a fortress, being only accessible on one side, and that by a difficult path, whilst the flat top would permit the erection of solid fortifications when there was power sufficient to build them. But, as he sorrowfully concluded, any such attempt as that was now utterly out of the question. Stores and workmen had alike disappeared. They were but a small handful of men in the midst of thousands of natives, and they must do nothing that could by any means inspire a feeling of suspicion or distrust.

The attempt to intrench themselves upon the rock would certainly arouse both these feelings, and would defeat its own end. For the present the Indians were friendly enough, and had given Tonty a hut for himself and his companions. They would doubtless receive these other white guests with the same hospitality, and, in fine, there was only one thing now to do—to send

some of their number, by different routes, in search of La Salle, with tidings of what had befallen them, whilst the rest remained peaceably in the Indian town, cultivating the friendship of the natives, and gaining their confidence and good-will, until La Salle should himself return, and take command once again of the scattered and hapless expedition.

There was much discussion before this conclusion was arrived at. The friars and the two Frenchmen joined the party on the knoll, having sighted them from the river's bank, and the situation was discussed afresh, but with the same result. Father Gabriel declared that he should rejoice to live for a while actually in the very homesteads of the Indians, and occupy himself with seeking to redeem their souls and bring them within the pale of the Church. Boisrondet was for a while desirous that all the party should keep together and seek to track the footsteps of La Salle; but Tonty was firm in his resolution to remain where the commander had left him. Nobody could tell where he was, nor how soon he might return. Messengers must certainly be sent after him; but for himself he should remain in the locality where he had been left. La Salle would certainly seek him first, either at Fort Crêvecœur or near to this projecting rock, and nothing short of compulsion should drive him from the spot.

When it was plain that there was no moving him, Boisrondet declared his intention to remain with him; and then the matter of the selection of messengers was

discussed amongst them. Finally it was decided that Dautray and Duplessis should take one route, and Laurent and Messier another, and seek to find traces of La Salle, which they were to follow up till they came upon him. Then they would break to him the news of the utter disaster and loss which had fallen upon the contingent at Fort Crêvecœur, and urge him to bring with him, if possible, such things as would make good that loss. La Salle might be near, or he might be far away. It was impossible to forecast. But it seemed probable that the evil tidings which had reached him at Fort Frontenac (as related by the messengers he had sent to Tonty) would have obliged him to go as far as Montreal—perhaps even to Quebec to interview the governor there—and even the sanguine and courageous Tonty could not reasonably expect to see him back before July or August. Still there was no knowing, and he would remain here to be ready.

So the little party, after spending one night together in the Indian lodge, amid strange surroundings and strange sounds, broke up upon the morrow; the four messengers departing with such store of provision as they were able to carry, while the rest of the party prepared themselves for the unfamiliar, yet monotonous existence of the Indian village.

It was a strange and picturesque sight which was presented by this great Illinois town. The lodges, of which there were many hundreds, were long, low structures of wood, covered by mats which the squaws

wove from the reeds and rushes growing by the river. In shape they were like long tunnels, with roofs arched like those of a wagon. As a rule, several families inhabited one of these lodges; but to the white men was accorded a large and commodious one for themselves, and it was carpeted for them with the skins of buffaloes, and otherwise made as comfortable as was possible. They set up their forge at one end, and occupied themselves with such trifles of work as they found it possible to accomplish, and fraternized with the youthful warriors, who might be seen employing themselves in the manufacture of their rude weapons, binding a stone arrow-head upon its shaft with the sinews of a freshly-killed buffalo, or shaping a murderous-looking club from a newly-felled tree or sapling. Some sat quiet under the manipulations of the skilled tattooer, whilst others roamed about the woods in search of game, or chased the buffaloes across the rolling prairies.

The women did much of the field work, and employed themselves with the manufacture of mats, and with preparations for the perpetual feasts which celebrated any small event, even to the capture of a larger quantity of game than usual. It was an idle, monotonous existence, and little to the liking of the white men, who were perforce compelled to share it; but they made the best of it, and went hunting with their hosts, keeping up friendly relations with them, yet all the while maintaining a ceaseless and eager watch for the return of La Salle, whose

advent would release them from this uncongenial existence, and set them once more upon the path of discovery, which had grown so absorbing to each one of them.

In spite of the monotony and aimlessness of the life, the little party kept up their spirits wonderfully. They made themselves moccasins, mended their clothes and their weapons, learned to talk the language of their hosts with ease and fluency, and lived with them on terms of friendliness and equality.

The friars sought earnestly to teach them the truths of Christianity, but with such singularly small success that they grew discouraged at last. It appeared quite impossible to make any impression upon the minds of the people, and at last they gave up the attempt in despair.

“We cannot teach them—they will not learn from us,” they said in despair. “We can but retire apart into some retreat and pray for them. Let us make for ourselves an abode a league away in the wilderness, and there wrestle in prayer for them, and spend our days and nights in devotion. So alone can we help them, and refresh our own weary spirits.”

Any form of toil was welcome to the men, weary of idleness, and very quickly a comfortable hut was built for the friars at some distance from the Indian town, with its ceaseless squalling and yelping and revelry. The friars and the servant *l'Espérance* took up their abode there, whilst the rest remained in their matted lodge, and waited with ever-increasing impatience for

news of the absent commander, who might now be looked for at any time.

September had come; the summer was waning; it was important indeed that La Salle should appear before the Indians broke up their camp and went forth for their winter hunting. Anxiously did the few Frenchmen and their two faithful Indians watch and wait for tidings, but the first tidings which reached that lonely spot were not those of any arrival of friends, but rumours of horror and terror.

Tessouat had gone prospecting, and had been absent for three days. Suddenly he appeared in their midst, panting and pale. At his side was a Shawanoe Indian, who had been a visitor to the Illinois camp and had only recently left. The faces of both men were filled with a lively terror and dismay.

“The Iroquois—the Iroquois! they are upon us! They are bearing down upon us in thousands. They have sworn to slay and exterminate. They will spare neither man nor woman, young nor old. They will sweep the Illinois off from the face of the earth, even as they have swept away the Hurons, the Eries, and the Andastes. They will be upon us ere morning dawns, and who may withstand their fury when they come?”

In an instant the whole town was in confusion and panic. The Illinois were at no time a warlike race, no match for the fierce Iroquois, and at present their stoutest and hardiest warriors were absent from the tribe. The squaws rushed forth from their huts yelling

and screeching; children ran about howling, and the men danced wildly, and encouraged each other by singing their war-songs and uttering loud discordant war-whoops, whilst all the while their hearts were filled with fear, and they knew not which way to turn for help.

Tonty stood looking on at this wild, barbaric scene with a look of keen anxiety upon his face. He had his hand upon Boisrondet's arm; he motioned to Gaspard and Claude to keep close together beside him.

“My friends,” he said in a low voice, “we are in great peril at this moment. There is a deeply-planted suspicion in the hearts of the Illinois that we are the friends of the Iroquois, and therefore their enemies. It is true that France is at peace with the Iroquois, and that in Canada they are our friends. That is enough at such times as these to convince the Illinois that we are in league with their foes against them. It will need all our courage and resource to pacify these suspicions. Can you not see how they glower and frown at us, and shake threatening weapons in our direction? They will be upon us ere long. Have a care every man of you. Strike no blow; but be watchful and wary. Our lives hang upon a thread!”

Hardly had he so spoken when the truth of his words became only too apparent in a sudden rush of the Illinois warriors in their direction. They swarmed about the lodge, uttering savage cries and threats. They took possession of the forge and tools, and flung

them into the river. They hooted and danced and yelled, and accused their guests of being in league with their foes, and of having brought this invasion upon them; and had the little band showed the smallest trace of shame or fear, the savages would have sprung upon them with clubs and tomahawks and dashed out their brains in an instant.

But Tonty remained calm and firm and resolute. He told them that this was not so—that they knew nothing of this invasion, but that they would stand by them in the fight, and do all in their power to help them. Something in his manner quieted the Indians and restored a certain amount of confidence; but the lull was not to be trusted, and there was no sleep for the little party of white men in the Indian camp that night.

Sleep, indeed, would in any case have been impossible. The whole place blazed with fires. The warriors were singing, drinking, painting, and feathering themselves for the coming fray, and resorting to all the artifices of savage songs and wild dances by which the Indian warrior prepares himself for battle.

With the first light of the day so eagerly waited for, came more news. Young warriors had been sent forth as scouts, and now they came leaping back into the camp. The Iroquois were close at hand. They were on the opposite side of the river, and would almost immediately come in sight. But over and above this direful news the scouts brought back word that La

Salle himself was in their midst, with a Jesuit priest or two, and that he was leading them on against the Illinois!

A yell of horrid fury arose as these words were heard. The infuriated savages, declaring themselves betrayed by those perfidious white men whom they had befriended, rushed wildly upon the devoted little knot of Frenchmen, brandishing their weapons, crouching, bounding, gesticulating, uttering savage yells of menace, and for a moment it seemed as though nothing could save them from instant death.

But Tonty had faced the perils and chances of war too often to be daunted now. Raising his hand and his voice at once, he cried to the savage warriors that they were wrong—that the French were not their foes—and he offered that very moment to place himself in the forefront of the battle with his companions, and to lead them against the enemy.

Upon hearing this offer made with evident good-will, the screeching grew less clamorous, the faces of the savages took a different expression. They realized to the full the advantage of being led by white men with guns in their hands. And they rushed off to their canoes, to prepare to cross the river and place themselves in battle array. Tonty and his companions were hustled forward, and with them such of the Indians as possessed firearms. These first crossed the river and put themselves in position upon the opposite bank; the crowd of lesser warriors, with their bows

and arrows and tomahawks, crowding swiftly on their heels.

Soon the ranks of the advancing foe were seen through the belt of woodland, and the air was rent with war-whoops and wild yellings. If the Illinois were faint at heart, at least they made every outward show of courage and daring; but the answering yells of the Iroquois were every whit as fierce, and the two naked armies approached, leaping and screeching, and discharging bullets and arrows wildly at each other. Tonty scanned the ranks of the advancing foe with anxious eyes, wondering if by any chance it could be possible that La Salle was in their midst either as ally or prisoner, and taking in with the skill of practice the numbers and capabilities of the advancing host.

It was plain that the Illinois were no match for their foes. If his allies were to be saved, the fight must at all costs be stopped. What could be done? A well-nigh desperate notion flashed into Tonty's brain. He turned to his companions and spoke rapidly to them,—

“There is but one thing to do. The French are at peace with the Iroquois—that is true enough. I must go to them and seek to mediate. The Illinois do not really wish to fight. At heart they are afraid. If I can stop the fight they will bless us in their hearts. I will speak to the chief and see what I can do. If the fight once begins, they will certainly be vanquished, and we shall be involved in their ruin.”

“Where you go, I go,” was all Boisrondet’s reply.

“And I!” “And I!” answered Gaspard and Claude in a breath.

Tonty pressed their hands and answered nothing. He went and spoke awhile with a knot of chieftains in the Illinois ranks, and then with a wampum belt in his hand as a flag of truce, and with his faithful comrades by his side, he walked steadily and fearlessly forward with rapid steps towards the now silent and astonished ranks of the Iroquois warriors.

CHAPTER XV.

TREACHEROUS INDIANS.

THE Iroquois Indians, silent for a moment from sheer astonishment, suddenly raised a great yell. Arrows and bullets flew thickly round the devoted little knot of peace-makers striving to reach the hostile ranks. The missiles, aimed somewhat at random, did little hurt, but all at once Claude gave a short gasping cry, and Boisrondet flung his arm around him, else he would have fallen.

Tonty turned and looked. The lad had received an ugly wound in the neck, from which the blood was flowing freely. The Indians yelled louder than ever at the sight, and Tonty spoke with an air of authority and inflexible command.

“Boisrondet, take the lad back to the lodge. We must not needlessly throw away lives. Like enough all will shortly perish, but we must show no foolhardiness. Take him away, and thou, Gaspard, go back also. I will carry this through alone, and if I perish, I perish. But for the sake of La Salle, and our loyalty to him, we must husband our resources and be wary and cautious.”

For a moment there was dismay upon the faces of his companions. It seemed impossible to let him go alone into that swarm of yelling fiends in human shape. Boisrondet urged that the two lads should be sent back, and that he should accompany his friend. But Tonty knew that if he fell, there was no man save Boisrondet who could do anything towards leading and guiding the Illinois, and helping them to outwit and overcome the enemy; so he was firm that he must return to the other side of the river, consenting at last, and that reluctantly, that Gaspard should accompany him on his desperate mission to the camp of the Iroquois.

There was no disputing the final decision of the captain. Boisrondet wrung his hand, and led Claude's staggering steps back to the canoes which had brought them across. So soon as they were in safety, Tonty and his one companion walked quietly forward to the accompaniment of savage yells and flights of arrows; and Gaspard's astonished eyes beheld such a spectacle as they had never looked upon in quite such a measure before.

He had seen Indians in war-paint and feathers dancing and yelling and working themselves up to the fighting frenzy many times; but he had never seen anything quite so ferocious in aspect as the contorted forms and glittering eyes of these wild Iroquois. They twisted and writhed their agile forms this way and that like so many living human snakes. They leaped and crouched and bounded backwards and forwards around

the intruders, hissing, screeching, threatening, in most appalling fashion.

“Have a care, Gaspard,” said Tonty suddenly, in a low voice of warning; “they take us for Indians, we have grown so like our friends of the wilderness.”

And in truth their swarthy complexions, tanned by the hot suns and biting winds of the forest, and their half-Indian dress, had for a moment deceived the Iroquois, who were now thronging round them with gesticulations of fury. Gaspard felt his hair lifted by hands from behind, and the sharp edge of a scalping-knife pressed against his skin. He turned quickly round to find himself confronted by a painted savage of herculean frame, who brandished his knife and sang some fiendish song of triumph; whilst all around voices were clamouring that they should be tied up to stakes and done to death by fire in the approved method of the fighting Indian when prisoners were in his power.

Gaspard felt his blood run cold, and he laid his hand upon his dagger, resolved to sell his life dearly at the last and to die fighting tooth and nail rather than become the victim of that hideous fate. The clamour was growing terrific. It seemed as though any moment might see a bloody termination to this scene of wild confusion. Gaspard tried to lift his heart in prayer to God, and thought of his father, his brothers, Mary, Father Fritz, bidding as it were an earthly adieu to them in his heart. Then on a sudden the tumult died down slightly. Gaspard pressing towards the side of Tonty,

from whom he had been momentarily separated, saw that two chiefs were approaching him and quelling the wild yells of their followers. One of these wore a frowning aspect, and Gaspard heard him reply to the cries of the Indians by a brief promise that they should soon have the prisoners to burn; but the younger chief (who was an Onondaga) cried out that these were not Indians, but Frenchmen, and that if any hurt were done to them, the great Onontio would wreak a fearful vengeance upon themselves.

This information produced a great excitement, and when Tonty bared his head and showed himself as a white man indeed, a considerable sensation was produced, and some alarm was aroused by the fact that this Frenchman had already received many blows from the infuriated mob, and was bleeding at the mouth from the effect.

He and Gaspard were now hurried to the rear, where a parley began to take place. Tonty, cool and self-contained as ever, despite the rough handling he had received, spoke with perfect assurance when he could make himself heard. He warned the Iroquois that the Illinois were under the protection of the King of France and the Onontio, or governor of Canada, and demanded that they should be left in peace. An impression was beginning to be produced upon the chiefs (for the Iroquois were fully aware of the advantages accruing to them from their alliance with the French in Canada), when an ill-timed act on the part of some ardent Iroquois

chieftain went near to destroying all the good which had already been done. He had seized Tonty's hat, this young brave, and now strutted forth with it upon a pole and showed it flauntingly to the Illinois on the other side of the river. Naturally they believed that their white ally had been killed, and in a moment the firing which had ceased for a while recommenced with redoubled fury.

The panic and fury quickly ran throughout the camp and reached the rear, when all the ferocious threats and struggles began once more around the captives. Again and again it was demanded that they should be burned, and the young Onondaga had much ado ere he could make his voice heard, as he cried out that to burn two Frenchmen would sunder for ever the alliance between that nation and their tribes. Tonty, still speaking with calm nonchalance, warned the Iroquois to take heed what they were about, since there were at least twelve hundred stout Illinois warriors encamped hard by, and sixty Frenchmen with them, ready to lend them firearms and lead them to battle if need be.

Gaspard heard this audacious invention with a qualm of dismay. For the moment it seemed likely to serve its point, and it was all in keeping with the spirit of the times, which permitted any diplomatic falsehood in order to effect a laudable end. But Gaspard had a feeling that Father Fritz would never have stooped to utter a false word, had his peril been ever so great; and he wondered if it were justifiable to do so, even

when so much seemed to hang upon the possibility of effecting a cessation of hostilities.

For the moment there was certainly a lull. Whether or not the Iroquois fully believed the statement made, they were ready now to listen to Tonty's proposals for peace. They had certainly found the Illinois better armed and more warlike in spirit than they had expected. This pointed to the supposition that they might have white allies in their midst, and it was no part of the Iroquois policy to break the friendly relations which existed between them and the French of Canada.

In the end, Tonty and Gaspard were set free to return to the Illinois camp, bearing a belt of peace as a token. Tonty had a shrewd suspicion that the truce would be a very hollow one, but he proceeded cheerfully with his mission nevertheless. Before departing he asked of the friendly Onondaga chieftain if he could explain the rumour brought to the Illinois camp of there being white men with the Iroquois, and then, with a grin of humorous amusement, his savage champion showed him a suit of European clothing and a friar's habit which had come into their possession, and which they carried with them stuffed with straw, and displayed from time to time with a certain grim and savage pleasantry.

The Illinois received the ambassadors of peace with open arms, and the firing along the river banks ceased. But there was no trust to be placed in the pledge of the Iroquois, and the Illinois at once set about removing

their women and children to a great island in the midst of the river, where they hoped to find sanctuary.

The friars, Father Gabriel and Father Zenobe, came out to meet Tonty, and gave him fervent blessings, rejoicing in the marvellous escape that he had had. They had heard news in their log hut of this savage fight, and had hurried forth to take their part in it, but were only in time to hear that Tonty and Gaspard were in the hands of the Iroquois, no one could say whether alive or dead.

It was an anxious time indeed for all. The Frenchmen boldly remained in their lodge in the now deserted town, which had been partially burned before the Illinois decided to abandon it. The Iroquois swarmed all about, sometimes coming to buy provisions, sometimes spying round as though in search of their foes, always with a look of treacherous ferocity upon their faces that was anything but reassuring.

Presently they all crossed the river in a body and took possession of the deserted town, building themselves a sort of fort of the materials saved from the burning, and showing themselves anything but peaceable in their preparations.

“It looks bad,” said Tonty, who had surveyed their operations with grave attention. “They profess friendliness to us, but I do not trust them for a moment. We must keep all together, and above all things show no fear. They are afraid to do anything to break the alliance with France, but save for that fear they would murder

the whole of us with the greatest pleasure any day. We must be wary and watchful.”

Two days later came a rather peremptory invitation to the Frenchmen to take up their abode within the fort itself. Tonty looked grave, but decided that resistance would be useless, and that a show of courage and confidence gave them their best chance. He calmly told the messenger that if they would provide a separate lodge where he and his companions might dwell together, they would come; and this being arranged, the little party, including the two friars, found themselves the guests of the Indians within the wooden walls of their redoubt.

Claude was still weakened by loss of blood, and Father Gabriel was his kind and attentive nurse. The wound was healing rapidly, but both he and Tonty were suffering somewhat from the rough handling they had received. This life of inaction, therefore, was not altogether unwelcome, were it not for the constant sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

They were relieved, however, to find that their foes were also rather uneasy. They knew very little as to the strength of their Illinois adversaries, and had been partially deceived by the stories told them by Tonty. When an army of Illinois suddenly appeared advancing over the low hills, as though to give battle and win back their township from the occupation of the invaders, the Iroquois warriors, despite their boldness, were filled with fear, and eagerly demanded of Tonty whether he

would go out as an ambassador, and make a truce with the foe.

This he gladly undertook to do, and chose the genial Father Gabriel as his companion. The Illinois set up a cry of rapture at sight of him, and rushed forward to meet him. A young Iroquois Indian had been sent as a hostage, and this proof of apparent good faith disposed the Illinois to trust in the overtures now made to them by their savage foes. They led their guests into a tent, and squatted down to hear what they had to tell them.

Tonty rose and made the first speech.

He said that the Iroquois desired peace rather than war, and that they regarded the Illinois now as under the protection of the Onontio of Canada. He laid certain proposals before them, to which they appeared ready to agree—indeed they would have agreed to anything in their real fear of the Iroquois, had Tonty not warned them by various signs and whispered words not to betray themselves—and after having offered refreshment to the ambassadors, they sent them away with presents for the Iroquois, together with a young man of their tribe as a return hostage.

It was a pity that this youth had been sent. Tonty instructed him on the way back to keep up a bold front before the invaders, but so soon as he was taken from the sheltering wing of the Frenchmen, he displayed the greatest fear and dread of the Iroquois. He was present at the council, but instead of comporting himself

with dignity and reserve, showed such eager desire to yield everything asked, and betrayed in such a number of ways the fears and weaknesses of his tribe—which Tonty had carefully kept a secret—that the eyes of the Iroquois chiefs began to gleam with anger, and their old insolence to return.

“Where are the twelve thousand trained warriors?” they asked with menacing gestures. “Where are the sixty Frenchmen who will lead them to battle against us?”

They gathered round Tonty, clamouring for an answer, and Gaspard again felt a renewal of the qualm which had assailed him when first he had heard the audacious statement made.

“Surely the truth would have hurt us less,” he said to himself, preparing for death at the hands of the infuriated Iroquois, who were now thoroughly suspicious and angry.

But Tonty was equal to the occasion. His stout heart never failed him even in moments of peril and extremity.

“Go and look for them in the ranks of the Illinois!” he answered defiantly. “Go out to fight, and see what reception you will meet. Go and make war upon the tribes the Onontio has promised to protect, and upon the white men of his own country, and see what will come of it. As for me and these my friends, we will befriend all those who are loyal to the King of France and the Onontio. But let them show themselves untrue

to him—and we will show what sort of vengeance the white man can take upon the Indian.”

A bold and threatening aspect and great swelling words were never lost upon the Indians. The angry faces grew quiet again. The chiefs exchanged glances and became calm. The negotiations were carried on, and the treaty was concluded; but the keen eye of the trained soldier saw at once that the Iroquois had no intention of keeping it.

They were busy from morning till night constructing canoes of bark, and well did Tonty know that so soon as the flotilla was complete they would make a furious attack upon the island retreat of the squaws and children, placed for safety on the reedy island.

Gaspard stole away in the dead of night with Swanalulu and gave warning to the Illinois of this probable attack. But as they returned stealthily to the camp before dawn, they saw fierce eyes gleaming out at them through the thickets, and knew that they had been watched and perhaps followed, and that their hosts were bitterly suspicious of them.

“If we do not soon get away from this place, we be all dead men,” said Swanalulu, as they crept within the walls of their lodge.

Indeed, had it not been for the fear the Iroquois felt of the wrath of the governor of Canada did they hurt French subjects, the Iroquois would have fallen upon the little band and cut them in pieces with the greatest good-will.

Instead of this, however, they invited them to a solemn council. Tonty was given a seat of honour amongst the chiefs, and the friars and two Dautrays were allotted lower seats on buffalo mats on the opposite side of the hut. After some rather grave and silent feasting had been got through, one of the leading chieftains arose, and upon his making a sign to his subordinates, a large object was borne into the room, which proved to be six packs of beaver skins.

These packs were laid down solemnly before Tonty, and the chief proceeded to make his speech.

It must be remembered that no Indian compact was considered to be binding without presents having been given. Promises without some more substantial tokens of good-will were regarded as so much empty air. These beaver skins, then, were to be given as a guarantee of good faith, and the chief proceeded in his verbose and flowery fashion to explain their meaning.

The first two packs being placed on one side close to Tonty's feet, the speaker declared that the Illinois, being now regarded by them as the children of Count Frontenac, the Onontio, should not be warred upon nor eaten. A third pack was placed almost in Tonty's arms, and it was intimated to him that this was a peace offering, intended to salve the wound which he had received. The next was a like offering to the rest of his comrades for any evil treatment they had suffered. As for the fifth and sixth, they were offered with rather more reserve, and it was said to the guests that the sun

was bright, that the weather was favourable for travelling, and in plain language they were recommended to go home the way they had come and trouble the wilderness no more!

Tonty fully understood the gist of the last recommendation. His hosts would have none of their advice or their espionage. They intended to go their own way, and to work their own will upon the natives of these wilds, and these were only bribes to get the white men out of their path before they commenced their raids.

Rising with dignity to his feet, Tonty expressed gratitude for the good-will shown him, but then fixing his eyes firmly upon one chief after another, he sternly demanded when they were going back to their own country, leaving the inoffensive Illinois in peace.

This query caused an instant change to come over the bland and passive faces of the Indians. Their eyes began to sparkle, their lithe frames contorted themselves, and losing their self-restraint, and forgetting the solemn pledge just made, they answered fiercely that they would fatten themselves upon the flesh of the Illinois ere they would return to their own land.

At that word an answering flash glowed in Tonty's eyes. His frame seemed to dilate in his anger, and suddenly he sent the packs of beaver skins flying this way and that, as he spurned them with an indignant foot.

“Think you,” he cried in ringing accents, “that I will

accept your gifts, when ye tell me to my very face that ye will eat the flesh of the governor's children? Are they not your own brethren, since ye are also his children? Shame upon you—you are false to your own pledges! In one and the same breath ye vow to live at peace with the Illinois, and to plunder, kill, and eat them. Have a care that ye do not so offend the great Onontio, that he take direful vengeance upon you. As for me and my comrades, we will remain with you no longer. The sun indeed is bright. The way, if long, has been trodden by our feet before. We will go forth to find the Onontio himself and tell him of your doings. Have a care, then, what those doings are, lest he fall upon you and smite you to destruction."

It was a bold line to take, but perhaps Tonty knew that in their desperate strait nothing but a bold show could possibly save them. Too faithful and true to accept presents which were little other than bribes, he was not afraid to scorn and spurn them, and speak up to the very last for his allies.

Nor were his bold words quite without effect, for the moment at least. The chiefs eyed each other, and none seemed ready to speak. Tonty, having done all that lay in his power for the timid and unwarlike Illinois, had now no option but to retreat into the wilderness with his little band. His life was not safe for a day, now that the Iroquois had made up their minds to attack. He had done what he could, and must leave the rest. With the Illinois he would be even less safe,

for having lived so long amongst their foes here, it would be regarded as a certainty that he and his men had become their allies and friends. Upon the first outbreak of the war, they would certainly be killed.

“We must go forth into the forest before they have time to change their minds,” he said to his companions, when they reached their lodge, and looked into each other’s faces. “To remain here beyond a day or two is to court certain death. They have given us a dismissal. The time has come when we must accept it and go.”

This was all too evident, and the conduct of the Iroquois showed it at every turn. Swanalulu was beset on all hands as he strove to pitch their canoe, to make it fit for the voyage up the river, which was their best method of travel. It was with great difficulty that he and Tessouat could carry on their work, so hustled and gibed and insulted were they. The Frenchmen within the lodge put together the few belongings still remaining to them, and sometimes walked out by twos together, so as to show their enemies that they had no fear. But sullen glowering looks met them on every side. Only the Onondaga chieftain kept up any show of friendliness, and he was feverishly eager to see the last of them.

“Make haste, make haste, before they change their minds!” he would say, and it was at the last his hands which held the prow of the canoe as the party stepped into it one by one, in the clear sunshine of an autumn

morning, just as the first crispness of the coming frost began to sharpen the air.

The banks were lined by savage-looking Iroquois, all regarding with sombre ferocity their departing guests. Tonty looked round at the crowds with stern and anxious eyes, reading something of menace in their aspect, which could not but render him uneasy. He was the last to step into the canoe, and scarcely had he done so before the paddles of the two faithful Indians were flashing through the water. Gaspard and Claude were also assisting with all their skill, and the little craft shot out into the stream at a right good pace.

Yet ere it reached the middle of the river there came a sharp report of a musket, fired by some unseen hand along the banks. The smoke issued from a reedy patch where no human form could be seen. But doubtless a pair of eager wolf-like eyes were gleaming from the tangled thicket, as the unseen marksman discharged his deadly weapon.

Was the bullet meant for Tonty, that conspicuous figure standing and regarding with stern and gloomy eyes the place which had been so long his home? Probably it was; but it missed its mark, and a grim smile flickered over Tonty's face. But the expression changed in a moment, as he heard a gasping cry, and saw that the good old Father Gabriel had sunk down in a helpless heap along the bottom of the canoe, the blood streaming from a small orifice in his temple.

"He is dead!" spoke Father Zenobe in an awe-stricken

voice. "May God rest his soul. He has trodden a thorny road to glory, but the peace of the just will be upon him for ever and ever."

With pallid faces and heavy hearts the little band rowed vigorously onwards, till they could find a place where they could bury their faithful comrade with such simple rites as were possible.

Then they recommenced their journey northward, which proved to be one of much hardship and peril, and which might indeed have ended by a death of starvation in the wilderness for all, had it not been that at last they fell in with the kindly Pottawatamies who had befriended them a year before, and who now took them under their protection, and conducted them in triumph to their village upon Lake Michigan, where the old chief, who so greatly admired and revered Count Frontenac and La Salle, received them with open arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOLD ENTERPRISE.

“**C**LAUDE, I have a plan! I have a great desire to accomplish something. Wilt thou share the adventure with me?”

Claude sprang up from before the fire, beside which he had been sitting, working hard at a new pair of moccasins which he was making for himself, and of which he certainly stood in need. His answer was to be pretty easily read in the sparkling glance of his eyes, before he pronounced it with his lips.

“Wherever thou dost go, I will go. I too am longing for something to do. We are safe here, and we are well fed and at ease, yet I long for action, for adventure, for some sort of pressing forward to the goal. What is it, Gaspard? What hast thou seen or heard? What is the plan in thy head?”

Gaspard looked round cautiously, as though to be sure there were no listeners; and yet there was no such great need of secrecy, for their hosts were quite ignorant of the French tongue, albeit they showed themselves so well disposed towards the French.

“Listen, Claude,” said Gaspard, “I may be wrong in my surmise; but I have a strong belief that our great commander, the *Sieur de la Salle*, is at this moment not so very far away, and that he is searching the country round in the diminishing hope of finding his brave lieutenant, *Tonty*, and the few followers remaining with him.”

Claude looked at his brother with wide-open eyes.

“Dost thou indeed think that?”

“Verily I do. Whilst thou hast been here in the village, tending our sick captain and brave *Boisrondet*, I have been abroad with the hunters, here, there, and all over in the forests. *Swanalulu* and *Tessouat* have likewise been abroad, and they had heard rumours and whispers from many of the Indian tribes, similar to those that I have caught whilst listening to the talk between the hunting parties we have met with and our friendly *Pottawatamies*.”

Claude’s face kindled with eagerness.

“You have heard of *La Salle*?”

“We have heard of white men—a small company—a divided company: men of whom the description tallies with that of *La Salle* himself, and our father, *Claude*, and the hunter *Nimrod*. There be others doubtless, but the words I have heard make me believe in very sooth that *La Salle* has turned back upon hearing of our peril and the destruction of *Fort Crêveœur*, and is now seeking us in the wilds, and, perhaps, even lamenting us as dead.”

“And thy plan?” asked Claude, breathlessly.

“Marry, that is soon told. My plan is to seek and to find him, to tell him of our safety, and bring him hither to the bedside of our brave captain, who has done and suffered so much in his service. I trow that that would be the best medicine that we could find for Captain Tonty.”

For Tonty had, soon after reaching the shelter of the friendly Pottawatamie village, fallen ill of a fever, a slight attack of which had prostrated him during their journey, and helped to add to their anxieties and perils. Boisrondet also, who had been devoted in his attentions, had caught a milder form of the same malady; and the two patients lay in a warm and comfortable hut together, kindly tended by their Indian hosts, and watched over also by Claude, who with his gentle voice and quick understanding made a first-rate nurse, and who had picked up his strength rapidly during this period of rest and ease.

Gaspard, who had stood the long, inclement journey better than anybody save the Indians themselves, had spent his time for the most part in hunting with them; Swanalulu being, as usual, his devoted adherent and attendant. These hunting expeditions had often taken them far away from home, and brought them into contact with Indians from other localities, for during the winter months the forests were full of wandering tribes, seeking food and stores of furs amongst the denizens of the wintry wilds. Wherever he had a

chance, Gaspard asked questions of these wandering Indians, and Swanalulu followed his example. Thus it came to pass that they gathered a number of isolated bits of information, which, when pieced together, seemed to make a tolerably connected tale, and to point strongly to the conclusion Gaspard had quickly leaped to.

“I fear me that our commander has had but ill success in the gathering together of such a band as he desires. I have heard it said that at Fort Frontenac he is surrounded by enemies, and that until he can return to Quebec and have speech with the friendly governor there, his affairs will never be on a better footing. He has enemies on all sides, and these stir up the Iroquois against him and against the Indians of the West; but at least there is this good in it, that these Indians around us here cling to us more and more closely, for they begin to say that the *Sieur de la Salle* is their only hope now against the raids of the jealous Iroquois, so they look to him and his proposed undertaking to make of them a strong and a rich nation.”

“That is good,” answered Claude, eagerly. “Methinks the jealous foes of the noble *La Salle* may chance to outwit themselves one of these days. But of him, himself, what hast thou heard? And what can we do to find him, if indeed he is in these parts?”

“I think that it must be himself from the respect and admiration which he seems to be winning from the Indian tribes as he moves along. The men we meet have not seen him themselves. But they speak of

white men who are travelling hither and thither, and who speak comfortable words of friendship to all as they go."

"Truly that sounds like our La Salle," answered Claude, quickly. "But where is he? and how shall we find him?"

"My purpose is," answered Gaspard, "if the captain will permit us leave of absence, to strive to cross the waters of the lake, and to travel to Fort Miami. Some say it has been destroyed; others, that it is rebuilt, and that white men are occupying it now. At least we know that La Salle looked upon it as the basis of his future operations. What more likely than that he should make of it headquarters now, whilst pursuing his search after us? We ourselves should have sought to reach it in our extremity, had not the friendly Pottawatamies offered to convey us to their own village. Methinks that, if news is to be had anywhere of him, it will be there. My plan, therefore, is to seek to cross the lake, and to make our way thither, ask if he has not been heard of there, and bring him news of our safety."

Claude looked admiringly at his brother, and his eyes kindled; yet as he glanced towards the icebound shores of the lake, and the tumbling waves and great ice-floes beyond the frozen margin, his face took a different expression, and he asked,—

"But is it possible to cross the lake before the ice melts?"

"It will be difficult, and even dangerous," answered Gaspard at once, "but Swanalulu says it is not impossible, and that he will come with us."

"But would it not be safer and better to attempt the journey by land?"

Gaspard shook his head.

"They say not. I have spoken to many. They are all agreed. It is the time of all others when land travelling is like to be worst. Now there is frost and cold and snow. But at any time the wind may change and bring deluges of rain, or melting snow, and the tracks in the forests will be obliterated, and the place become one giant morass which may well swallow us up, and through which we can never force our way. Then fevers and agues are begotten in these localities at these seasons—as indeed we have cause to know. Nay, the perils of the lake, though great, are less than the perils by land; and the way is far shorter. It must be the lake or nothing. What dost thou say, brother?"

"I will go with thee to the world's end!" cried Claude, who was weary indeed of inaction, and who was as fearless by nature as his stronger brother. "To find La Salle and our father and uncle! To bring him hither to cheer and encourage our brave captain! Oh, it would be worth all perils to succeed! When wilt thou start, brother? And whom beside wilt thou take with us? We must not leave our friends here quite alone. Can we not suffice with our two selves and Swanalulu?"

“That is my intention,” answered Gaspard. “Swanallulu himself says that the lighter the burden the better the chance of success. Ofttimes we may have to carry our canoe and provisions over fields of floating ice. Therefore must it be light and easy to lift. Moreover, Tessouat and l’Espérance must be left to attend upon the sick and Father Zenobe. We must not rob them of more than we can help. And we must obtain permission ere we take ourselves away.”

“Go then and ask,” cried Claude, eagerly, “and I will look over our small store of clothing, and see what will serve us best. The captain is awake and better to-day. He gains strength every week; but he will not be fit to undertake any such journey himself yet. If it is to be done, we must be the ones to attempt it.”

Gaspard nodded, and went forth into the keen outer air, where the brightness of the sunshine upon the snow was dazzling to the eyes. February was well advanced, but the cold was still piercing and intense. A thaw might at any time take place, but for the present the icy reign of winter was unbroken.

Tonty and Boisrondet with Father Zenobe occupied a large and commodious hut, which the Pottawatamie chief had made over to them for their use, having somewhat unceremoniously ejected therefrom his own wives in favour of the white guests.

When Gaspard entered, it was to find Tonty extended upon a pile of buffalo rugs beside the glowing fire of logs; whilst Boisrondet sat beside him, amusing himself

and his friend by a game of dominoes, which he had ingeniously contrived out of small slabs of wood, marked by a charcoal stick.

At sight of Gaspard both turned towards him with expectant looks, and the friar, who sat close to the fire with his breviary in his hand, laid it down and smiled kindly and benevolently, whilst Gaspard involuntarily bent his knee for the accustomed blessing of the kindly and adventurous ecclesiastic. Gaspard was to them the chief medium of communication with the world outside, and his visits were always hailed with pleasure and interest.

He did not speak to the captain with the confidence he had employed towards his brother. The name of La Salle did not pass his lips, for he did not wish to arouse hopes and expectations which possibly might not be justified. But he spoke of the rumours current as to the proximity of white men upon the farther side of the lake, and hazarded a suggestion that La Forest at least might be there, at Fort Miami, and that he might have news of La Salle. La Forest was one of the few faithful lieutenants upon whom La Salle could rely. It was possible enough that the party of white men who had been seen might be under his command. Tonty thought the suggestion well worth consideration. It certainly seemed of the first importance that the forces of the Frenchmen should be concentrated as far as was possible in one place. Their own band was a very tiny one now, but four or five stout hearts outweighed in value

a score of half-hearted knaves. If the thought came into Tonty's mind that La Salle might himself have returned, he did not give it utterance in Gaspard's hearing, but listened quietly and attentively whilst the latter sketched his plan of attempting the passage of the lake, and at the end held out his hand and gripped that of the youth in a warm clasp.

“Thou art a right trusty comrade, and we shall miss both thee and thy brother sorely; but yet thou shalt go. Peril lies before you. But you all have stout hearts and strong arms, and have passed through too much danger before to be daunted now. Swanalulu is a good man, and true-hearted. He is wary and skilled in all the crafts of the forest. Go then, and our good wishes shall attend you. But seek us not here when you return with your tidings, whether for good or ill, for it is our purpose, so soon as I am able to travel—which Heaven send may be in a short time now!—to journey to Michili Mackinac, to the colony there. That being in the direct line between Canada and the west, all those passing from one to the other must needs tarry there. Thus we shall gain news of La Salle, if we find him not there in person, and there we will await you, or any messengers that you may despatch to us.”

This being understood and agreed upon, Gaspard lost no time in setting about his simple preparations.

First Swanalulu had to make choice of the lightest and strongest canoe which was to be had, the friendly Pottawatamies vieing with each other in placing their

goods and chattels at the service of their guests. The canoe being chosen, it was next carefully laden with provisions securely tied up in bladders, so that no water should get at them, and they could be easily carried on the shoulders if necessary. Strong paddles were selected, and a pair of snow-shoes for each traveller was added to the cargo. The excited Pottawatamies crowded round the travellers with small presents of tobacco, or with items of advice and information which Gaspard strove to take in and remember. The wind was still blowing keenly, but without the violence which had characterized it during the previous weeks. The sun was gaining in power; and there was a chance that the voyage might be a favourable one, although the ice-floes in the lake must be a source of danger.

Upon the morning of departure, Tonty himself came out for the first time, leaning on the arm of BoisronDET, and full of good wishes for the voyagers, whom doubtless he greatly desired to join. Father Zenobe gave them all his blessing before they stepped on board, and commended them to heaven in a pious prayer, the Indians all kneeling upon the frozen ground with every outward mark of reverence. The old Pottawatamie chief followed the example of Tonty and BoisronDET and warmly grasped the hands of the voyagers; and then, instructing his men to tow them over the frozen margin and launch them safely in the deeper water beyond, he stood like a motionless statue whilst his orders were carried out, and led the way in the matter of a grand

whoop of triumph, as the light canoe glided smoothly off the ice at length, and shot out into a channel of clear green water beyond.

Gaspard sprang up and waved his cap, and Tonty and Boisrondet gave a cheer, which the Indians strove to imitate. The sun shone with such dazzling effulgence upon the water that the little frail bark could soon scarce be distinguished as it rapidly glided on its way. Presently it disappeared altogether behind a great floe of floating ice, and Tonty turned back towards his hut with a long-drawn sigh.

“Pray Heaven I have not sent those brave lads to their death!” he said. “But I would that I could have shared with them the peril and the quest.”

To the boys, out upon the lake, in the midst of sparkling ice and unfathomable green water, it was as though they had suddenly been launched into a glittering fairyland.

Soon the illusion was enhanced by wonderful fairy music which assailed their ears on all sides. It was just like peals of silvery bells ringing around them—ting!—ting!—ting! and then a perfect shower of liquid notes of unspeakable sweetness. They looked at each other in amazement. What could it be? Were there really ice and water nymphs and fairies, and had they steered into the midst of a magical concert?

Swanalulu saw their bewilderment, and grinned from ear to ear. He stood paddle in hand in the prow of the little craft, and guided it with extraordinary skill

through the masses of floating ice. Gradually the boys began to understand from whence came the fairy music. The floating fragments striking against the sides of the canoe each gave forth a sweet ringing note, and as the little craft kept her course, these notes were indefinitely multiplied, till all the air was alive with sound. Many splinters were under the water, and invisible to those in the boat, but all rang the peal as they encountered canoe or paddle, and the boys listened in a maze of enchantment, which lasted far through the first day of travel.

So far all had gone well; and with the approach of night they took counsel together. The cold was intense; but they were provided with buffalo robes, and were inured to the severity of the climate. Hardship did not daunt them; but the question of caution came in, and they took counsel together whether to land upon a mass of ice, drag up their canoe, and camp there, or whether—since the moon would soon give sufficient light, and the wind had lulled—they should continue their journey through the water, striving to get as much of the voyage accomplished as was possible, whilst these favourable conditions lasted.

It was settled at last to continue the voyage. Swana-lulu was untiring in his energies, and Gaspard and Claude had willing hearts and strong arms. They took turns to propel the little craft, and sang songs to the accompaniment of the fairy music. The moon shone down upon them with a steady, luminous brightness, and lit up the great solemn flocs of ice, and the

mysterious stretches of black water with a weird and wondrous beauty. On, on, and on they glided, turning this way and that to find a channel for themselves. The intense cold, though it chilled their limbs, could not touch their spirits. But the face of Swanalulu began to look grave as he noted the increasing pack of the ice, and just before morning dawned he suddenly called out,—

“Jump out for your lives!—quick!—quick!”

Claude had been dozing amid his furs, but he was awake upon an instant, and Gaspard was out of the canoe and upon the ice almost before the words were out of Swanalulu’s mouth. In a twinkling they had hauled up the little craft to a place of safety beside them, and scarcely had they done so before the two gigantic masses of ice closed upon each other with a dull scrunching roar, and the air seemed for a moment to be full of pistol shots echoing round and round them.

“That was a near thing!” said Claude, with a little shiver.

“What is to be done next?” asked Gaspard, as he looked round him at the great packed masses of ice upon which they stood.

“Light a fire and wait for daylight,” was Swanalulu’s practical advice, and welcome enough was the thought of fire to the half-frozen travellers. They had brought a supply of wood with them, enough at least for one or two such bivouacs. True, it might have to be left behind if things went ill with them; but for the present

there it was, and the Indian quickly selected a spot where the ice walls rose up, giving shelter from the wind, and soon a leaping fire was illumining the ice-fields with rosy splendour, and Claude almost lost sense of cold and hunger in watching the beautiful effects of the red flickering light upon the white and green walls of their shelter.

They laid down their buffalo robes, and stretched themselves luxuriously before the fire, whilst they partook with keen appetite of their provisions, boiling down lumps of ice in their pan, and mixing for themselves some hot strong cordial to keep out the cold, and then sleeping profoundly beside the fire until the sun peeped over the horizon at them, and lit up the fields of ice with a million sparkling points of fire.

The boys sprang up from their couch, and looked earnestly about them. They found themselves indeed in an arctic world. The frozen lake stretched around them as far as eye could see, sometimes in a comparatively smooth plain, but more often encumbered with masses of packed ice, where it had come down in the shape of icebergs after partial thaw, and had become welded together in solid masses. There was no open water to be seen near at hand, and it was plain that the only mode of progression was the slow and toilsome one of carrying or dragging their canoe and provisions over the frozen surface of the lake.

“Never mind,” cried Gaspard, cheerfully, “it is no more than we expected and prepared for. At least it

will be hard work, and will keep us warm, and that is something to be thankful for in such a place as this."

So the little party started bravely forward, sometimes carrying and sometimes dragging their canoe with them. They would not part with their precious store of wood, although it made their labours more arduous. They looked forward to camping again at night beside a glowing fire, and that was worth to them the toil of the day.

It was slow work and hard, but the novelty and interest of the scene bore the youths bravely along. Swanalulu showed the customary Indian sagacity in picking out the best tracks, and here and there a narrow thread of water enabled them to launch their vessel for a brief spell, and ease themselves of their heavy load.

How far they progressed that day the boys found it very hard to guess. Swanalulu could not say exactly, but he hoped that only one more night's camping might be necessary after this second one. The moon arose with a haze around her, which caused Swanalulu to look anxious as he scanned the line of the horizon. The wind too had changed its direction, and blew in softer puffs from the south, instead of sweeping along in giant force from the north.

"It is the thaw coming," cried Claude, gladly. "Now we shall skim along merrily."

But Swanalulu, though he smiled cheerfully, shook

his head and muttered something about a storm being no joke for a light canoe in the midst of masses of floating, drifting ice; and Gaspard realized that the thaw might not be welcome at such a moment as this.

However for that night they slept at ease beside their fire. It would freeze hard enough so long as the sky kept clear. Fatigue lulled their senses and drowned all anxiety, and both Gaspard and Claude slept the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion, and only awoke the next morning to strange sharp sounds in the air resembling shots more than anything else.

They started up to find themselves wrapped in a moist, warm fog, whilst the sun glimmered faintly in the sky above, and something like a warm drizzle seemed to fall upon their faces. The sounds in the air continued to ring out, and Gaspard exclaimed with sudden comprehension,—

“It is the ice cracking and splitting. The thaw has come indeed!”

So it had, and most rapidly. Before long they saw before them a wide expanse of open water, upon which they eagerly launched their canoe. Ice was about and around them, and strange sounds filled the air, but the warm drizzling rain continued to fall, and the air felt wonderfully soft and mild. It was March by this time, and the sudden thaws of these regions were well known to the travellers, but seldom indeed had a thaw come with such marvellous celerity.

Until nightfall their journey was prosperous; but with the sinking of the sun there came a rise of wind, and the moon being obscured by masses of angry-looking clouds, the darkness surrounded them, and their frail bark was tossed like a cockleshell upon the troubled waves. Often they saw looming before them the ghostly outline of a mass of drifting ice, and it needed all Swanalulu's quickness and Gaspard's strength to avoid a collision with the dangerous mass.

There was no sleep for the crew that night, and how long the night seemed to them can better be imagined than described. Many a time did they make up their minds that they could not escape from being swamped by the angry waves, or ground and crushed between the ice-floes now hurtling along before the gale. Moreover, it was impossible to keep a regular course, or to know often what their course was. They could only seek to keep their craft alive in the turmoil of the storm, and to let it drive whither it would, so long as they kept it afloat.

But the wind had much of west in it—Gaspard was certain of that, and thankful for it. Perhaps it would help them across the lake, even though it might drive them ashore much higher up than they had intended. But in that case they could coast along with the shore in sight, without any great danger, and his spirits began to rise, as towards the dawn of the morning the wind seemed disposed to fall, and the sun rose strong and bright despite the drifting clouds, showing him the faint

outline of land in front, at sight of which he uttered a joyous shout.

Yes, it was land sure enough, the farther shore of the great Lake Michigan. Swanalulu scanned the line of the shore with great attention as they urged their canoe towards it, and then, heading the little vessel almost due south, declared that before nightfall, if they worked hard, they might be within a day's journey of Fort Miami.

Despite the fact of having had no sleep the previous night, the brave-hearted party desired nothing better than to pursue their course with unabated energy. For the time being the wind had gone down, but none knew when it might rise again. To cover as many miles as possible in the lull was certainly the wisest course to pursue; and strenuously did they all work at the paddles, only resting when forced to do so by sheer exhaustion, and enjoying the satisfaction of seeing headland after headland swiftly passed by, and knowing that every stroke of the paddle brought them nearer to their destination.

The day began to sink. Angry clouds piled themselves in the west and south. It was plainly going to blow another storm at sundown, and the little party, anxiously scanning sky, water, and land, determined to drive their little craft ashore and spend the night there, deciding upon the morrow whether to continue their journey by water or on foot.

Quickly the canoe sped to the land. A small bay,

fringed to the water's edge with pine trees, seemed to give invitation and harbourage. As the daylight fell, the glare of a fire not far in the forest told of the proximity of some Indian camp.

"They will doubtless be Outagamies," said Swanalulu, who had a wide knowledge of the people of the lake and their habits. "They are our friends. They will give us welcome and shelter and food."

Gaspard and Claude had found the sagacity of Swanalulu always to be trusted in these matters, and after having made fast their canoe, and taken from it a roll of tobacco as a present for their prospective hosts, they marched fearlessly for the fire, and were quickly surrounded by dusky faces, all grinning a welcome, whilst Swanalulu talked to the Outagamies with a rapidity which it was impossible to follow.

Gaspard and Claude drew near to the friendly fire, and warmed their numbed fingers. The red glow fell full on their faces as they did so. Suddenly there was a stir close at hand. A recumbent figure, hitherto lying extended upon a heap of leaves and covered by a buffalo robe, started up into an erect posture, a sudden cry escaping from his lips.

Gaspard and Claude turned with a start—and found themselves face to face with their brother Jules!

CHAPTER XVII.

HAPPY MEETINGS.

“JULES!”—“Gaspard! Claude! my brothers!”

The words came all together in gasps of astonishment, and the brothers, regardless of the surrounding ring of dusky Indians, fell into each other's arms with sounds of mingled laughter and weeping, hugging each other and exchanging kisses, as those must do who, after long parting and grave fears for each other's safety, find themselves once more united.

Even the silent Jules found his tongue in the excitement of this encounter.

“O my brothers! my brothers! We had begun to mourn you as dead! We have been seeking you through the wilderness, and amid such sights of horror as made our blood run cold. It seemed impossible that ye could have escaped, and yet our lion-hearted commander hoped on ever against hope. Ah, where have ye hidden yourselves? where have ye been all this while? Tell me—tell me all! Where is the brave *Sieur de Tonty*? Where the rest of the little band? Say that ye are not the only survivors.”

“Nay, nay, God has been merciful and good to us. Tonty lives, and Boisrondet too. They are safe with the friendly Pottawatamies at this moment, and will soon take their way to Michili Mackinac, there to wait for tidings of La Salle. Tell us of him, brother, tell us of him! For we have heard naught but rumours of disaster and trouble. Where is he? Has his lion heart failed before the tactics of his foes? Has—”

“Need ye ask?” cried Jules, almost indignantly. “When did ever his great heart fail? True, things have gone against him in a terrible way. He has enemies on all sides, enemies who traduce him to the State and even to the King of France, and who stir up the Indians against him when his back is turned. But does he ever lose heart? Never, never, never! He knows not the meaning of the word. When his hand is on the plough, his eyes know not how to look back. He is pledged to the navigation of this great river; to the discovery of the country which is watered by its broad stream; and from that purpose he will not turn back, nay, not for all the enemies in the world, until he has brought it to a successful issue.”

“But where is he now? where is he?” asked the brothers in one breath.

“Stricken down with snow blindness not three leagues hence,” was Jules’s answer. “The glare of the snow has served several of our party the same. Our father is with him tending him. I set forth with Nimrod—trusty huntsman—to find game, and also to

seek for a certain herb which is said to give relief in such cases. In doing so we hit the trail of these Outagamies, and whilst Nimrod went back with the game, I came after them to see if they could help me to the remedy needed, and perhaps supply us with more provisions. They are a kindly and hospitable race to their friends, and La Salle desires to gather about him representatives from all the western tribes, that he may speak with them seriously of the perils which are now threatening them, and seek to establish amongst them an alliance with the French, and a consolidation amongst themselves, so that instead of wasting their resources in petty warfare against each other, they may draw closer and closer in bonds of amity, and be able to turn a bold front upon the real foe of these latitudes—the fierce and aggressive Iroquois.”

Strange indeed was it to hear the silent one speak with such fullness and eloquence. The brothers hung upon his words, and poured out question upon question.

How was it with their father? How was it with their uncle, the father of Louis? When and how had they heard the news of the misfortune which had fallen upon Fort Crèvecoeur? What reception had La Salle met with in Canada? How went it with the little colony at Niagara? and was it true that Fort Frontenac had been seized by the commander's creditors?

These and a hundred more questions were eagerly poured out upon Jules, and he on his side was equally anxious to learn how it had fared with his brothers

after the destruction of Fort Crêvecœur, news of which had been brought to them at Fort Frontenac by Jean Dautray and another of the messengers, after La Salle's return with supplies from Montreal.

Sitting beside the fire, and partaking of an excellent meal of cooked buffalo meat provided by the Indians, Gaspard and Claude told their tale to Jules; he listening with the keenest attention, and growing almost excited when he heard of the colony in the Green Valley, and their emigration to the south to act as pioneers for La Salle and his party.

“Nay, but that will be good hearing for our gallant commander,” he cried. “It is just such news as he needs to give him fresh heart and hope after all these many discouragements. It sometimes seems as though all the world were against us. Now he can think of these unknown allies building up a place of refuge for us, waiting our arrival. And wherever Father Fritz is, there will loyalty and good faith abound. The miserable strifes and jealousies which have so embittered his life will not find entrance amid a community that has so good a man as pastor and teacher.”

“And now, Jules, tell us thy tale,” urged Gaspard. When the meal was over, the lads wrapped themselves in their buffalo robes, and drew close together in the shelter of a great hollow tree, not out of reach of the warmth of the fire. This was indeed ease and luxury, a soft couch of leaves, warmth all around them, and to be once again all together after long parting, the winter

frost yielding, and the glad summertide before them, their commander amongst them again, their father and brother restored.

“Tell us all,” echoed Claude, laying his curly head upon Jules’s knee in child fashion. Jules put his strong, thin fingers upon the sunny head, and stroked the soft hair with tender touch as he complied with this eager request.

“To tell all would indeed be a long story, but I will tell you what is most important in our adventures. The journey was unspeakably difficult and trying, as at that time of year it must be. Often we were stopped by wild tempests; sometimes we could not cross the rivers save by constructing rafts to carry us over, they were so swollen with the melting snows. Then, again, ice sometimes barred our way and broke up our canoes, and the prairies were often no better than quaking bogs, into which we sank more than knee-deep, and the traversing of which was so exhausting that our men almost dropped from fatigue, fell ill, and had to be nursed and tended ere they could proceed on their way. Sometimes unfriendly Indians hung upon our rear and harassed us sadly, so that we dared not light fires at night. We then had to take off our wet clothes and wrap ourselves in our blankets, and in the morning sometimes our clothes had frozen so stiff that we could not put them on again.”

“And did you fall ill with all that?” asked Gaspard.

“No, but I was the only one who did not—I and the great La Salle himself,” answered Jules. “We struggled desperately on, and at last reached the little colony we had left on the Niagara; but there our spent and exhausted men could do nothing except to lay down their weary limbs, as though they would never rise again. It was there that our uncle breathed his last—”

Gaspard started, and Claude raised his head suddenly.

“Our uncle—Louis’s father! Is he then dead?”

“Alas! yes. He had struggled and fought bravely against illness, and had not given in, even though he could scarce trail one foot after the other, and his example had encouraged the sick as much as the brave words of La Salle. But once within the shelter of the huts, with white faces round him, and the consciousness that the commander could now choose other followers with whom to complete his journey, he seemed to lose all hold on life. He fell into a stupor of exhaustion which we at first thought sleep; but he never woke from it again, and passed away quietly two days later.”

“Poor uncle!” said Claude, quietly. “He was a brave and good man. Our father had not joined you by that time, of course. Go on, Jules; what happened then?”

“La Salle could not tarry. But he left the rest of us to refresh ourselves, regain our strength on Niagara, and rejoin him later at Fort Frontenac. He took with him two or three of the men we found there, and pushed on alone. After we had buried our poor com-

rade, and the sick had recovered themselves, we went on to Fort Frontenac, but La Salle had left it by that time for Montreal. Things were bad, we found. Greedy creditors had seized his seigniories, and had traduced his good name. Another great misfortune had happened. A vessel from France, laden with stores for La Salle and his colony, was wrecked in the great St. Lawrence's mouth, before she made harbour. The men escaped with their lives, and found their way to Quebec, ready to join La Salle and his enterprise. But there his enemies got hold of them, some declaring that he was dead, others that he was bankrupt and ruined, and would never be able to carry out his intentions, or to pay those who were foolish enough to trust him. And those foolish fellows, instead of seeking speech with Count Frontenac—always the friend of La Salle—and hearing the truth from him, took in every spiteful rumour that they heard, and believing themselves to have been made fools and dupes of, lost heart and returned to France in an outgoing ship, without so much as troubling to find out whether the stories they had heard were true or not."

"Alack! alack!" cried Gaspard. "Misfortune seems to dog the steps of the brave commander! Lost he not heart at such evil tidings?"

"Nay, it seemed but to spur him to fresh endeavours. He had not lingered at Fort Frontenac, but had hurried to Montreal, whence he shortly returned with men and stores, which, despite the desperate condition of his

finances, he had contrived to gather together. It was whilst we were setting things in order for a second start that our father and Laurent arrived with the evil news of the wreck of Fort Crêvecœur, and the destruction of all the slender stores there, and of the peril in which Tonty and the rest of you had been left. Greatly did La Salle now blame himself for having sent that message to Tonty, which had resulted in his leaving the Fort, and had given to the mutineers their chance. But as usual, he lost no time in fruitless lamentations, and resolved to start off at once in search of his few remaining followers left in peril in the wilderness. Almost at the same time came news that the mutineers had made a raid upon the fort at the mouth of the St. Joseph, and had plundered it of all the stores of furs there, after which they had destroyed it. It was said, too, that some of the mutineers were in the neighbourhood of Fort Frontenac, and we set forth at once in the hope of finding them; and in fact we caught several of them, and left them in prison there, to be dealt with by the governor, whilst we ourselves set forth into the west, to search for Tonty and his little party there."

"And how many were you then?"

"La Salle and La Forest were our leaders, and we have about five-and-twenty Frenchmen and a number of Indians, some of whom insisted on bringing their wives with them, to the annoyance of the commander. After a time it became evident that we could not travel

quickly enough with such a large company. La Salle bid La Forest take the command of the main body, and make his way as he could to Fort Miami, whilst he himself with a few picked men pushed on ahead in search of Tonty."

"And you went with him, Jules, and our father also, I doubt not?"

"Yes, truly, and we took Nimrod with us, and faithful Hunaut, who is stanch to the core. We made our way to the Illinois—found the deserted city, which is half in ashes now. We climbed to the great rock in eager hope that Tonty and his band might have made a stand there, but it was silent and deserted, and there was no trace of any sort of habitation having ever been attempted. Then we tracked the footsteps of the Indians down the stream. We saw deserted camps on both sides of the river. It was as if Illinois and Iroquois had moved along, one on each side of the river, afraid to come to close quarters, yet unwilling to leave each other alone."

"That is likely enough," answered Gaspard. "We did what we could to make peace, but it ended in both sides distrusting us and growing unfriendly. Then we gave it up and came away. What happened I know not; but I fear that, if it came to blows, the fierce Iroquois would score a bloody victory over our fainter-hearted allies. If these could but have been loyal to us, and true-hearted and courageous, we might have saved them yet, methinks; but they cannot trust—they have

grown up so long in an atmosphere of treachery and deceit.”

“Poor souls! they have suffered for it,” answered Jules, with a slight shudder at the recollection of the sights he had witnessed. Our attention was attracted at last to the circling of vultures and other evil birds round a certain plain beside the river’s bank. We hastened on, and there saw terrible traces of battle and vengeance. The ground was strewn with scalped corpses of Indian warriors, their flesh almost stripped from their bones by this time. But more horrible still, a little lower down was the sight of innumerable stakes set in rows together, where charred bodies—mostly of women—told a frightful tale of Iroquois cruelty. Carcasses of children strewed the ground. The horror of the sight I can never forget, for we could not pass it by with shuddering horror as we would fain have done. We knew not but that the bodies of our faithful friends and countrymen might be lying amongst the slain, or strung up to these awful torture stakes. We could not leave the place without examining the sickening sights displayed there; but at least this drop of comfort was left to us—in no case could we find any but Indian corpses upon either field. Our hearts were still full of anxious fears, but there was room for hope yet. We followed the course of the river. We came to Fort Crêvecœur, silent and deserted, with the unfinished vessel on its stocks charged with its ill-omened message. Then downward we went till we

saw before us the flowing waters of the great Mississippi—the bourne of all our hopes. But it was no time then to seek to navigate its mighty waters. No traces of white men could be found anywhere there. We had but one hope now, and that was to retrace our steps, and seek news of you at Fort Miami or Michili Mackinac.”

“Poor foolish Illinois!” murmured Claude, compassionately. “If they could but have shown a bolder face, and have let us lead them out to battle, methinks that horror would have been spared them. But go on with thy story, Jules.”

“It is wellnigh done. Having failed here to trace you, we returned to Fort Miami, cheered sometimes by seeing the mark of a saw here and there in the wood, or by hearing a rumour that white men had been seen, yet quite unable to obtain any definite information. The winter set in very hard. We had some trouble in getting back to Fort Miami; but once there, La Salle set about making friends of all the scattered Indian tribes of the neighbourhood, and seeking to draw them into an alliance with the French and with each other. This has been all the easier to do since the frequent Iroquois raids have stirred up the alarm of the natives of these wilds. No one is more clever and skilful than La Salle in dealing with the Indians. He wins their confidence and respect in a wonderful way. Even the distant Shawanoes have sent a chieftain to seek the protection of La Salle. He has answered that he cannot come to them, they are too distant, but

that if they will meet him on the Illinois later on, they shall share in the glory of the expedition; and the warrior retired, promising to be there with his band at Fort Miami in the autumn."

"The autumn!" cried Gaspard, quickly. "Why, it is scarce spring now. Surely we shall not lose the whole of the bright summer weather ere we start for the great river!"

Jules shook his head gravely.

"That is the misfortune. We must have more stores and men than we have gathered yet. The tactics of La Salle's foes have been only too successful. He will have to go again in person to Canada ere he can hope to start. It is thus that precious time is lost. But if we have friends down south, making ready for us—why, that is a thought which will cheer the heart of the commander as nothing else has cheered it these many days. That, and the news that Tonty is safe, will be the best medicine he could have."

Long did the brothers talk together in the shelter of their tree. The night was far spent before their eyes closed in sleep; and yet with the first dawn of day they were astir again, and eager to be taken to the camp in the forest, where La Salle was awaiting the melting of the snows to restore to him his lost eyesight.

Joyful indeed was the meeting in the bark hut, when Jules presented his two brothers, and Gaspard, with a break in his voice, assured La Salle that Tonty was safe and sound, and was preparing to make his way to

Michili Mackinac, to await there the news he hoped to gain of the whereabouts of his commander. La Salle's bandaged eyes shed tears of gratitude at hearing this news, and Swanalulu was sent forward to Fort Miami to bear the joyful tidings to La Forest there, with instructions that he should go to Michili Mackinac to meet Tonty on his arrival, and tell him all the news of the party.

La Salle himself was bent upon a mission to the Miami town on the St. Joseph, near to the portage of the Kankakee. It was of the first importance that the Miamis should be thoroughly convinced of the advantages of the French alliance, and be made their trusty friends. If they were won, most likely the smaller tribes would follow. Much good seed had been sown amongst them during these past months. Now a solemn council was to be held, in which La Salle was to address them, and from which much fruit was hoped.

The main object of the council was, of course, to induce the Miamis to lay aside their jealousy of the Illinois, and to unite with them in favouring La Salle's project, and in holding back the raids of the Iroquois in the north. Various other tribes were to be represented at this council, and it was La Salle's wish to appear at it almost unattended, that he might demonstrate at once his own confidence in these allies, and his fearlessness in their midst.

He had selected Jules, Dautray, Hunaut, and the

Indian hunter as his companions, but he permitted Gaspard and Claude to accompany him now. It was a pleasure to see the joy of that long-sundered family in this strange meeting in the wilds, and as soon as the melting of the snow had restored to La Salle his eyesight, the little camp was broken up, and the party made their way to the Miami town, which was filled to overflowing.

Indians from all the neighbourhood had flocked in to be present at this solemn council; but amongst these visitors had come three insolent young chiefs from the Iroquois. These braves had spent their time —so reported Nimrod, who had been sent on in advance to glean intelligence—in speaking scornfully of the French, in declaring that they would never dare to show their faces here, and had strutted and swaggered about the place with the aggressive insolence of a conquering race, greatly disturbing the minds of the Miamis, and causing some of them to repent in their hearts of their promised support of the white men.

This was just such a critical situation as La Salle loved to grapple with. Without losing a moment's time, other than what was needed to arrange his dress and present an imposing appearance, he marched forth from his lodge, with the Dautrays behind him, and came face to face with the three young Iroquois in the great square before the tents of the chiefs. Their faces changed at sight of him, and they ceased suddenly the swelling words they were uttering. But before they

could slink away, as they seemed desirous to do, La Salle had sternly confronted them, and in a voice of thunder he dared them to repeat before his face the lies and calumnies they had uttered behind his back.

Thus brought within radius of the lightning gleam of those fiery eyes, the warriors grew faint-hearted and ashamed. They dared not meet the glance of La Salle; they stood mute and confounded, images of guilty fear. The rest of the Indians set up hooting shouts of anger and triumph, and when it became known that, as soon as night fell, the youthful braves had slunk away to the forest again, a revulsion of feeling possessed all hearts, and men said to each other that La Salle must indeed be endowed with wonderful strength and power, since he had tamed by a word and a look the aggressive insolence that not the presence of hundreds of armed warriors of hostile tribes had been able to quell or subdue.

This was as favourable a beginning as could have been wished, and the rest of the day was spent by the Frenchmen in receiving visits from various chiefs, and in laying before them the advantages of the projected alliance between themselves and the Illinois, and the necessity for a concentrated banding together to repress the haughty and aggressive Iroquois.

The way being thus paved, the party retired to rest, and upon the morrow the council was solemnly held in the great lodge occupied by the chief, which was so arranged as to hold as many as possible, whilst the

matted walls were taken away, so that the crowd without might be able to hear all that was spoken.

La Salle had become a mighty orator by this time, and was well versed in the Indian ways. First he sent around rolls of tobacco, and then a canoe load of presents was brought in, upon which all eyes were eagerly fastened. There was cloth in which to bury their dead, coats in which to clothe them, hatchets wherewith to raise the grand scaffolds on which it was the custom to lay them after death, and all sorts of baubles and trinkets to deck their funeral feasts. This was a delicate and graceful way of making gifts. The living seized them for their own uses, but preserved the pious fiction that they were dedicated to the departed. La Salle spoke of the clemency and bounty of the great monarch whose servant he was, and told them how it extended to all the tribes of the forest who would receive him as their friend and king. Not only were the living remembered, but also the dead; and here La Salle dexterously introduced a panegyric upon a lately departed chieftain, and ended by declaring that he himself would step into the vacant place and become their chief, and in token of his sincerity and good-will would assume the late chieftain's name and take upon himself the support of his wives and children.

This noble generosity provoked a chorus of delighted wonder and admiration, and when that had died down La Salle came to the pith of his speech; and whilst he was making it, the Dautray brothers, each carrying two

guns apiece, made a round of the principal chieftains—six in number—and presented each with one of these coveted weapons.

“He who is my master, and the master of all this country,” spoke La Salle with a fine effrontery, “is a mighty chief, feared by the whole world; but he loves peace, and the words of his lips are for good alone. He is called the King of France, and is the mightiest among the chiefs beyond the great water. His goodness reaches even to your dead, and his subjects come among you to raise them up to life. But it is his will to preserve the life he has given; it is his will that you should obey his laws, and make no war without the leave of the Onontio, who commands in his name at Quebec, and who loves all the nations alike, because such is the will of the great king. You ought then to live at peace with your neighbours, and above all with the Illinois. You have had causes of quarrel with them, but their defeat has avenged you. Though they are still strong, they wish to make peace with you. Be content with the glory of having obliged them to ask for it. You have an interest in preserving them; since, if the Iroquois destroy them, they will next destroy you. Let us all obey the great king, and live together in peace under his protection. Be of my mind, and use these guns that I have given you, not to make war, but only to hunt and defend yourselves; so shall you win the praise and favour of the great king who sends you this message by me.”

With these words he paused and held out two belts of wampum in confirmation of his words, and with cries and shouts of approval and joy the assembly broke up, promising an answer on the morrow.

When that answer came it was such as caused the eyes of La Salle to sparkle with joy.

“The Illinois is our brother, because he is the son of our father the great king. We make you, his servant, the master of our beaver and our lands, of our minds and our bodies. We cannot wonder that our brothers of the east wish to live with you. We should have wished it too, if we had known what a blessing it is to be the children of the great king.”

While the chiefs spoke these words, and many others of like import, the people without sang and leaped for joy. A mighty feast was made, which lasted three days, and La Salle and his Frenchmen had much ado to satisfy their hosts in the matter of appetite.

Then taking leave of them with many expressions of good-will, and accompanied by them almost as far as Fort Miami, they returned in triumph thither; and taking canoe thence made their way without further mishap to Michili Mackinac. There Tonty was awaiting them, tears of welcome shining in his honest eyes, and as he held La Salle's hand once more in his own, he exclaimed in his native tongue,—

“The Lord be praised!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREAT RIVER.

“ **A**T last! At last! At last!”

Such was the voiceless cry of many hearts, as the three canoes, bearing the foremost of the pioneers, glided from the current of the Illinois out upon the wide, majestic bosom of the Mississippi.

Gaspard was standing in the bow of the foremost canoe—the one which contained La Salle, Father Zenobe, and four of the new recruits. Just behind came Tonty and Boisrondet, with Jules and Claude in their company. A little behind followed another larger vessel, more deeply laden, and manned by fine-looking white men, French for the most part, who broke into excited shouts and cheers as the three frail crafts paused in their course, whilst their occupants gazed with wondering eye upon the vast volume of water pouring down through this mighty channel.

The initial perils and difficulties had been passed. Here was La Salle, with a compact little company of trusty followers, the perilous and exhausting toil of the many hazardous portages past, his goods and his canoes safely transported from Canada, an attendant company

of Indian allies close behind, launched at last upon the vast tide of the majestic river, ready to follow its course down to the ocean, and open a grand highway from thence to France.

A year—or, to be quite accurate, eleven months—had elapsed since the meeting of Tonty and La Salle at Michili Mackinac. La Salle had been forced once more to go back to Canada to set his affairs in order, and to beat up recruits and lay in stores. Thanks to the warm support he always received from Count Frontenac, who was heart and soul with him in his desire for the success of the enterprise, he had succeeded in his mission. Tonty with a few faithful followers, amongst whom he numbered the Dautrays and Boisrondet as the most trusty, had wintered upon Lake Michigan, spending in fact the whole of that time between Michili Mackinac and Fort Miami, laying in stores of furs, making friendly overtures to all the Indian tribes within reach, and cementing the good understanding which now existed between them. They had also constructed canoes and collected supplementary stores. Fain would they have tried to build another vessel, but the many failures of the past had decided La Salle against another attempt. The immense difficulty of portage to the Illinois River would in itself have been almost enough to thwart the success of the measure, and La Salle had openly announced that his next voyage must certainly be performed in canoes. No one knew exactly what perils from shoals or rapids they might not meet on

their way, although it was pretty well determined now that the river was navigable in Indian fashion to its very mouth. That a ship must be built for the transmission of furs and feathers for the French trade before the success of the cherished scheme could be in any way demonstrated, was an obvious fact; but La Salle had learned by experience that he must not attempt too much at once.

His object upon this journey was to discover beyond all doubt that the Mississippi was navigable, even for vessels of considerable size—a thing he fully believed. Having once made sure of this, he intended to return up the river forthwith, and establish a colony upon the great rock overlooking the main Illinois town, building there a fortress which should hold at bay any raids from the hostile Iroquois against the friendly tribes who were to help him in his great achievement.

After doing this, he might probably himself return to Canada, or even to France itself, to lay his plans before the king, and obtain further supplies and patents of power. Armed with these, he would return—possibly by the southern sea route—to the mouth of the Mississippi, and after establishing another garrisoned fort at the mouth, he would commence to plant his line of colonies all along the course of the great river, whilst his ships would ply to and fro from the Gulf of Mexico to France, taking eastward the stores of beaver skins and other precious commodities which he should gather from the Indians all along the banks of the

Illinois, the Missouri, and the Ohio, and bearing westward those stores of ammunition and supplies so needful to the white man dwelling in the Far West.

Once let him be free from the perils of transport through Canada, where enemies, both white and dusky, lay in wait for his messengers at every turn, and where rapids and cataracts engulfed many a consignment of costly merchandise—and wealth and success must flow towards him and his colony as a matter of course. He had made his plans with care. Count Frontenac had warmly approved and promised every assistance. His heart was burning now with the foretaste of this long-deferred triumph. Reverses of all sorts had met him before. Surely Fortune's wheel was about to turn, and he would see his new enterprise crowned with success.

Feelings and aspirations such as these possessed the hearts of all the party, as the frail little crafts glided out upon the turbulent waves of the mighty river. Swanalulu, in the prow of the second canoe, gave a warning shout, almost simultaneous with one from Nimrod in La Salle's,—

“Ice, ice, ice! Have a care! Make for the shore and let the ice-packs go by. The current is too swift for us to pilot our way amongst them.”

“To the shore, then,” answered La Salle readily. “We will wait for the ice to melt and go by. Our Indian comrades have lagged behind. We will rest awhile, and give them time to come up.”

So the three canoes paddled ashore, and an encampment was quickly made in the forest, other canoes containing French recruits coming up one after the other as the day advanced.

Altogether the party numbered nearly fifty Frenchmen, the bulk of whom were trusty fellows, eager for the success of the enterprise. There were some dozen Indians with them, amongst whom were Swanalulu, Tessouat, and the Mohegan hunter, Nimrod, whose dog-like devotion to La Salle had become proverbial by now.

But in addition to these there were quite a hundred denizens of the woods, who had been picked by La Salle from the multitudes offering themselves, as best fitted for the work. Many of these were Shawanoes, faithful to their promise to meet him at Fort Miami on his return; others were drawn from surrounding tribes; and almost all were skilled in the use of the gun, and were entrusted to carry these coveted weapons.

The Indians could not be persuaded to leave all their squaws behind, and some delay naturally arose, owing to the rather overcrowded state of the canoes. La Salle in his eagerness had outstripped his allies in his desire to reach the Mississippi. But having done this he was ready to rest his men, to give his Indians time to come up, and to let the ice melt and disperse before attempting further navigation.

In a week his objects were accomplished, and the sun had begun to shine out bright and warm. It was about

the middle of February, in the year 1682. They were leaving behind the cold and snowy regions of the north, and every day was bringing them nearer and nearer to the genial warmth of the green south.

The spell of rest was pleasant, and gave them opportunity to stock their larder with fresh meat; but it was with eager delight that the party took to their canoes again, and at daybreak set forth upon the now smiling waters of the great river, to follow its many windings to the ocean itself.

Towards evening Gaspard shouted that they were approaching the junction of another great river, and Swanalulu and the other Indians, to whom the paddling was entrusted, exchanged many warning cries and signals. But Tessouat shouted out that there were no rapids—only a great volume of swirling muddy water to be encountered, where the Missouri poured its waters into the Mississippi; and he led the way downwards, keeping rather closely to the left bank, whilst the voyagers gazed in wonderment at the vast torrent of leaping brown water that flung itself into the widening waterway which they were navigating.

Down, down, down they flew, the mighty current sweeping them along. They passed the Indian town of Tamaroas, now deserted, the Indians not yet having returned from the winter hunting. It took them a week to reach the junction with the great Ohio, by which time they had almost exhausted their supplies

of meat, and calling a halt near to the third Chickasaw Bluffs, they made an encampment and scattered in search of game.

It was a wonderful country, and there was a warmth and fragrance in the air, which struck with a soothing kind of charm upon the senses of those who had long been inured to the sharp and bracing cold of the hardy north. The Dautray brothers wandered forth together to hunt and explore, delighted by the beauty and glamour of this New World; and they planned how they would, in days to come, settle together and form the nucleus of one of the chain of colonies that was to play so great a part in the history of the New France. Gaspard dreamily pictured life here, with Mary as his wife, bringing up their children in this wonderful wilderness, and living a beautiful free life, with none to make them afraid.

They were detained some days here, owing to the disappearance of one of their party, who lost himself whilst straying in search of game. La Salle, energetic as ever, employed the interval of search in constructing a fort, as a commencement of the colony which might some day be planted here. And when the missing man was found at last, and brought back exhausted and half starved to the camp, the commander sought to atone to him for his sufferings by calling the building by his name, and Fort Prud'homme it remained in memory of this incident.

Down, down, down went the flotilla of canoes, and

now the sunshine became strong and hot; the scented air was laden with drowsy sounds of insect life. The verdure of the forest took a new beauty, and the tree trunks were often encircled by the twining tendrils of some beautiful flowering creeper. The hiss of a snake in the grass was not unfrequently heard by those who landed, and the forest was alive with many forms of animal life unknown in the colder north. The wild cat glared at them through the branches of laurel, magnolia, and myrtle trees. Sometimes they could see lynxes slinking through the semi-tropical forest; and numbers of graceful deer of many varied families and tribes bounded away at their approach, or gazed from a distance at the white intruders with wide and frightened eyes.

As they descended they saw sleeping in the mud the giant alligator, whilst huge turtles basked upon sunken logs lying in the sedges. The river began to team with fish; they saw the fierce and restless gar with his horny scales, and the catfish blinking at them from the muddy depths of the pools. Here and there they would sight a solemn pelican, standing motionless at the river's brink, whilst the blue and the white heron flashed and skimmed hither and thither, together with the whooping crane and ducks of many colours and varieties. The golden and white-headed eagle were seen from time to time sailing aloft in the sky, and the woods at dawn were rendered clamorous by the harsh cries of the wild turkey.

It was indeed a wonderful region, and the travellers never wearied of observing and admiring. Often the river was wrapped in a thick soft haze which rendered the shores invisible, but by noon this had generally cleared away, and the sun shone out with a power and glory seldom seen in the north. Sometimes they were forced to camp in the forest, the heat being too great upon the water; and when this was so, they plied their paddles far into the night, and often swept down the black and glassy waterway to the golden light of a wondrous tropic moon.

All this while they had received no molestation of any kind from Indians, nor had they encountered any perils from the nature of their waterway. No foaming cataract barred their progress, nor did dangerous rapids impede their prosperous voyage. Nothing could have been more favourable than the journey had so far been, and each day the look upon La Salle's face became more tranquil and content. The heavy shadow which had rested upon him for so long seemed to be lightening at last.

It was now the middle of March. The canoes were skimming along through the thick haze of the early morning, when, for the first time since their voyage upon the Mississippi itself commenced, their ears were assailed by the rattle of Indian drums. This sound, together with the shrill cries of the war-dance, came from the right bank of the river. La Salle instantly ordered his party to land upon the opposite side, and to throw

up as rapidly as possible a fort of felled trees. So quick and dexterous had his followers become by this time, that in an incredibly short space of time this had been done; and when the haze cleared away shortly after noon, the Indians on the opposite bank beheld, to their unspeakable amazement, a party of white men and a strange new building which appeared to have been brought there by magic.

Chattering and screaming in astonishment and affright, they came crowding down to the water's edge, gesticulating and yelping in their wild amaze. La Salle made friendly signals to them, held out the calumet and a wampum belt, and invited them by signs to come over to him.

This, after some delay, they did; and being assured of the peaceful intentions of the invaders, they examined them with the greatest interest, and invited them to cross to their own town.

La Salle, whose policy it was always to show confidence in the Indians, accepted this invitation at once; and his whole party of Frenchmen crossed the river, leaving only the Indians behind in the fort, and were warmly welcomed by the natives, who gave them huts and placed food before them, and told them that they had heard that white men were coming, and that great joy and prosperity were to accrue to all the land from their advent.

La Salle, after much close questioning, heard that almost two years before a small band of white men had passed that way and had told them this. They

had dwelt amongst them for a while like brethren, and a holy man had instructed them in the religion of the white man, and had planted a cross in their midst. Once since then he had come to visit them, and they knew that he and his white men were living in some favoured spot lower down the windings of the great river, beloved and trusted of all.

This was excellent news for La Salle, and greatly was he pleased by the bearing and manners of this people, who were Kappas, of the tribe of Arkansas. They were exceedingly beautiful to look at, but most modest and respectful in their bearing, never intruding into the huts of their visitors without invitation, and otherwise comporting themselves with a decorum and gentleness very unusual amongst Indians. It appeared, indeed, as though the truths of Christianity had made a greater impression on this people than upon any other they had ever come across. Father Zenobe, who spoke with them, declared that the seed sown by Father Fritz had borne fruit in a marvellous manner, and when he gathered them together round the cross and addressed them in a brief homily, he was listened to with a comprehension and sympathy utterly different from anything he had ever met with in Indians before.

But another ceremony was enacted there before La Salle took up his journey. He spoke to the assembled tribe of the temporal monarch who was the servant of the cross they had come to reverence as a sacred symbol. He then displayed before their admiring eyes

the arms of France, and presently heading a procession he solemnly went forth, and planted these upon another knoll in close proximity to the one upon which Father Fritz had erected the sacred emblem of the Christian world.

The Frenchmen raised a shout of "Vive le Roi!" The Indians took up the cry, and shouted themselves hoarse with loyal acclamations. Then, bidding adieu to their new allies, now calling themselves French subjects, they took to their canoes again, eager to reach the great Indian town of Tensas, of which their new allies now told them.

It took them several days to reach it, and they saw many signs of Indian habitation along the river's banks as they glided by. When at last they reached the neighbourhood of the town, and after a two hours' walk succeeded in reaching it—the Kappas having sent an envoy on to announce their coming—they were lost in astonishment at what they beheld.

Instead of mere huts and lodges of mats and straw, this town was built of brick made of sun-baked mud, and thatched in dome-like shape with golden straw. The houses were of fine proportion, and placed in regular order round great enclosures. The main room of the chief was forty feet square, and opposite to his lodge was a great temple or house of the sun.

The chief sat awaiting them in a dim light—for there was no opening, save the door, to his reception-room—seated upon a throne which resembled a bed-

stead. Around him were sixty of the oldest men of the tribe, arrayed in white cloaks made out of the bark of mulberry trees. Several of his wives were seated just behind him, and when he spoke they all raised their voices in a howl, which was their fashion of showing him honour and reverence.

His reception of the white visitors was very gracious, as was also his manner of receiving the presents they had brought. As an answering courtesy they were conducted at the close of the interview to the temple of the sun, and gazed curiously at this strange erection, over which seemed to flutter the forms of three giant eagles cleverly carved in wood, and all facing the east. A palisade of stakes surrounded it, and upon these stakes were fixed the heads or skulls of enemies sacrificed to the sun, whilst the braided hair of the victims was twisted round great shells which were ranged on a block before the door. Within was a structure of wood, something like an altar, before which a fire was kept continually burning, tended by two old men devoted to the office.

There was said to be a treasure chamber in this temple, where the vast riches of the tribes of the south were stored; but this was not shown to the visitors.

Upon the following day the chief condescended to return the visit paid him, and again accepted a number of presents from the strangers. He promised his goodwill to all white men coming in the name of the King of France and of La Salle. But the commander did

not seek to plant any standard here. He felt sure that such a request would be refused, and that it might stir up jealousy and distrust.

Resuming their voyage upon the morrow, the travellers quickly found themselves drawing near to a more populated region. Some canoes darted suddenly out upon them, and seemed disposed to show a hostile attitude, the bank of the river being quickly lined with Indians, but La Salle displayed the peace-pipe and addressed the warriors in his usual gracious and successful fashion. Immediately their anger was appeased, and they begged the intruders to land and accept of their hospitality, and quickly set before them a sumptuous feast, whereat La Salle spoke to them of his plans and projects, whilst they listened with delight and admiration.

These were the Natchez Indians, and they too spoke of the little colony of white men, and how they loved and revered them. Father Fritz had lived amongst them for a month on two different occasions, and though they did not show the same growth in spiritual comprehension which had struck the party so much in the Kappas, they were very friendly, and were quite ready that the cross and the arms of France should be set up by La Salle with solemn pomp; though, as they themselves were still devoted to the worship of the sun, the meaning of the cross was still something of a mystery to them.

The Natchez told La Salle that the next two tribes

along the river's bank were the Coroas and the Oumas. These were both friendly towards the white men, and traded peacefully with the settlers who had made their home a little south of the territory of the Oumas, but before you came to the lands of the Quinipissas, who were a treacherous race, and would probably prove unfriendly to the Frenchmen. The Quinipissas lived near to the mouth of the great river, where it discharged itself by several outlets into the sea. The Natchez cautioned La Salle to have a care how he trusted himself to these people, as they were treacherous and unfriendly, and would doubtless do him a mischief if they could.

Glad to have so much information as to what to expect, La Salle bid a friendly farewell to his entertainers, and after leaving behind a goodly number of presents to be distributed at the discretion of the chief, pursued his journey once again, eager now to reach the goal of his voyage—the little pioneer colony of white men, and the mouth of the mighty river.

The information given them by the Natchez proved to be correct. The Coroas and the Oumas received them with friendly welcome; were able even to address them in a few phrases of their own tongue; and told them that their countrymen had made a small settlement in a pleasant and fertile valley some few leagues above the limits of the Quinipissas boundary.

The ardent impatience of the Dautray brothers to see the face of their cousin and Father Fritz once again

had become almost unbearable; whilst Gaspard's heart beat high at the thought of seeing Mary face to face. The long night seemed interminable, as they lay in the lodges of the friendly Oumas, too excited to sleep, and wishful only for the dawn of day, which should enable them to take their journey through the tropical forest, and bring them to the place their countrymen had found.

The winds sighed in the trees above their heads; the soft air came charged with aromatic scents. Gaspard whispered to Jules the story of his love for Mary, which had begun as a boyish admiration and chivalrous devotion, but had ripened with his growth, till it was the most earnest desire of his heart to win her for his wife.

His heart had never swerved in its allegiance; but how about hers? Two years had passed since they parted, and that is a long space in a maiden's life. There were many fine youths and stalwart men in the company, who would doubtless fain win such a treasure themselves. Could she have forgotten the half-made pledge? Would he find her the wife of another? He set his teeth at the bare thought; yet resolved all the while that no reproach should pass his lips, even if this were so. He could but leave her and seek for forgetfulness. Nay, was he not pledged even now to La Salle and his plans? Marriage might not be possible for such a one as he.

In thoughts like these the night slipped away. The

sun began to climb the eastern sky in great bounds, and the voices of the wood announced the new-born day.

Gaspard arose, resolved to plunge himself into the clear waters of the river and so wash away the mists and cobwebs from his brain; and stepping from the lodge, he summoned Swanalulu to watch the water and warn him of the approach of alligator or other foe.

But hardly had he done so—hardly had he made a forward step—when he suddenly stopped short, and uttered such a cry of joy and welcome as brought his brothers and many others tumbling forth out of the dwelling-houses. For there, in the clear morning sunshine, his fine and gentle face illumined by the old sweet smile of welcome, stood Father Fritz, and Gaspard, with another fitful cry of welcome and delight, flung himself bodily into the arms of his old friend and father.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HOME OF PEACE.

“IT is wonderful!” said La Salle.

“How beautiful!” exclaimed many voices, as the little party, under the escort of Father Fritz, stood looking down upon the scene lying like a map before their eyes.

They had left their canoes in the river, and had struck inland on foot about an hour ago. They had climbed a gentle ascent of wooded hill, terminating in a rather sharp pitch, and now stood looking over the ridge, upon the country lying below them, spread out before their eyes like a map.

It was beautiful indeed, as so many had said. In its way it was wonderful too, as the commander’s eagle eye had not failed to detect upon the instant.

A wide and undulating plain of green lay stretched at their feet, dotted with abundance of giant trees, and watered by a rippling rivulet—one of the innumerable small tributaries of the giant Mississippi. But the great feature of this valley was the erratic course run by the stream, which, towards the centre of the plain, made a

great loop or horse-shoe, the ends of which were so close together that they could be guarded by a palisade and gates. This great loop enclosed an area of quite a hundred acres in extent—a hundred acres of rich pasture land, rising gently above the river level, and shaded by noble trees.

It almost looked like a green island surrounded by a ribbon of water, and to all practical intents it was an island, guarded on all sides by the water, save just at the one small isthmus, where it was protected by its gates and strong walls.

A further protection than the river afforded was given by a palisade, not very high, but sufficiently strong, running all the way round on the inside of the water-ring; just within this palisade was a belt of ground some fifty yards deep, which looked from the distance like a bright, variegated ribbon. This was, in fact, the garden ground of the little colony, now a blaze of gorgeous blossom. Within this line of border, came a row of buildings—the homes of the colonizers. These houses were substantial in form, and built in two curved lines, following the course of the river, one on either side of the loop. They were composed of the sun-baked bricks of river mud, such as the travellers had seen lately amongst the Indians; but they were ornamented and diversified by beams of wood, and carved pediments and lintels, such as brought back to the memory the timbered houses of Old England.

The roofing of these houses was of golden thatch,

which gave to the place a homely and picturesque aspect. The centre of the island was all green pasture land, where cattle and sheep—the llama-like sheep of the country—fed peacefully and in safety, or lay beneath the shadow of the trees chewing the cud. In the centre a fountain tossed its sparkling waters into the air. The sun seemed to rest lovingly upon this favoured spot, and to bring forth all good things out of the well-tilled ground.

Besides the houses were two buildings of more remarkable size and proportion, upon which the eyes of the travellers gazed in wonder. One was a large square erection, almost like a fortress, standing just within the protecting gates, at the west end of the isthmus. The other was exactly opposite to it, at the eastern extremity of this oval loop, and at a glance its character could be determined. It was a beautiful little church, cruciform in shape, built partly of bricks and partly of timber, but with such loving care, that it was, with all its simplicity an exquisite structure, and its graceful, tapering spire a marvel of patient and skilful workmanship.

The church was crowned by its cross. The corresponding building at the western extremity flew the flag of France from its centre turret. The church was flanked by two smaller buildings, one on each side. These were in fact a schoolhouse and the house where Father Fritz dwelt, and where he showed hospitality to strangers of every nationality who might come that

way. The other houses of which mention has been made formed two curving lines, running round the loop and converging again towards the western fort. They were independent buildings in themselves, but were built for safety in a solid block, and were connected by a long thatched veranda which was the common property of all the inhabitants.

In the wonderfully clear air all these details could be plainly seen, even from a considerable distance, and La Salle took all in with the eye of a general, and exclaimed again,—

“It is wonderful!”

Beyond the river boundary lay the cultivated lands of the colonists—fields of maize, wheat, and other grain, flax for their weaving, hemp for rope-making—and here and there a railed enclosure, where young buffalo calves, caught upon the plains in their babyhood, browsed peacefully, and were taught to wear the yoke and to plough the fertile lands. Beyond, again, were signs of Indian habitations—little clusters of huts and cabins peeping out from the thick foliage of the surrounding forest. It appeared as though the green isthmus were a centre from which radiated peace and blessing and goodwill towards all men, and as though the Indians sought to place themselves within the charmed circle.

Gaspard's heart beat high with a sense of eager anticipation, as he gazed downwards into this favoured valley. Fit home, indeed, did it seem to him to be for

his Mayflower—his darling. He had heard of her welfare from Father Fritz. He knew that she was true and loving and faithful. But one short half-hour more and he would hold her in his arms, and pour forth all his story into her ears! How eagerly he pressed to the side of Father Fritz to hear what he was telling La Salle, respecting the little colony! Was not every detail of immense interest to him, since Mary had been doubtless concerned in every item of it?

“We have been singularly blessed by peace,” Father Fritz said, in reply to a quick question from the commander. “From the first we strove to show the Indians that we came as friends, and not as foes. We took precautions, as you see. We have not left ourselves defenceless in case of attack; but no serious attempt to molest us has ever been made. The Quinipissas are the only tribe with whom we have had trouble, and that has not been serious, although we have not been able to place confidence, so far, in the protestations of friendship which from time to time they proffer.”

“And is that square building a fort? Have you any ordnance secreted behind its stout walls?”

“No; we have some guns, and a small supply of ammunition which we use as sparingly as we can, keeping it against a possible time of peril. That building could doubtless serve as a fortress, if need be, but it is our common storehouse for our supplies of grain, flax, and so forth; and the top story is devoted to the consignments of furs and dressed skins,

over and above what we need for ourselves, and which are to be dispatched to His Majesty of France when once navigation has been opened between the river's mouth and that country."

La Salle's eyes sparkled. He grasped Father Fritz by the hand, and exclaimed,—

"You are really laying up stores for that purpose, my noble-hearted friend? Do you mean to tell me that your children yonder are content to set aside a part of their valuables, and send them into France, without asking anything in return?"

"We have all that we need," answered Father Fritz quietly, the light deepening in his clear blue eyes as he spoke. "We are learning every day to manufacture for ourselves all that we require. Why should we burden ourselves with this world's goods, when at any moment we may be called upon to leave them behind us?"

La Salle looked curiously at the speaker, and then said, questioningly and tentatively,—

"Leave them behind! Surely you do not contemplate moving from this place of peace?" and catching a look, which he could not interpret, upon the face of the other, he added quickly: "Surely you are not in any imminent peril of death from hostile tribes?"

"I believe not," answered Father Fritz quietly. "Thank God, I believe that from peril of that sort we are singularly safe, and that His blessing is with us and will rest upon us. But, my friend, how if the Lord

Himself should come, and we should be caught away to meet Him in the air? That blessed promise is yet unfulfilled—yet to be looked for by those who take the Lord at His word. Has He not said that He will so come? Has He not promised a special blessing to those who shall be found watching and waiting for His coming?”

La Salle was silent. He had no words with which to answer such a question. Father Zenobe was likewise silent, this thing not having been considered by him in his meditations upon the Scriptures. The brothers Gaspard and Claude fixed earnest eyes upon the beloved face of their former teacher, and perhaps it was the eagerness of their looks which caused Father Fritz to speak again.

“We have been studying the blessed Scriptures much together, my children and I, since we found rest in this home of peace. And greatly have we been struck by the continual words of promise, and of the hope of the coming of the Lord with which the teachings of the apostles are full. That was the hope of the early Christian church—to see the Lord return. Surely it was a blessed and a glorious hope, and should never have been forgotten. The Lord, for His own good purposes doubtless, has delayed His return these many hundreds of years, but His word cannot fail. Did He not Himself say that He would come at an hour when no man looked—in a time of carelessness and unbelief? Did He not say that, when we saw evil

days coming upon the earth, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and abominations and desolations everywhere, we were not to be faint-hearted; but rather to lift up our heads, because our redemption was drawing nigh? And what is this redemption, save the redemption of the body spoken of by St. Paul?—when, instead of being unclothed by death, we shall be clothed upon with immortality—caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and changed into the likeness of His glory? Did not even the Psalmist speak of this when he declared: ‘When I wake up in the likeness of Thy glory, I shall be satisfied with it’?”

Claude’s liquid eyes were full of feeling. Gaspard’s heart seemed to give a responsive bound. There was something in the simple earnestness and directness of Father Fritz’s words—something in the overflowing affection and piety of the man which brought home to their hearts his teaching, as it was never brought home by the good friars who spoke to the company Sunday by Sunday, and read the various offices of the church as occasion permitted. It was as though Father Fritz saw in the spirit the things of which he spoke—as though some sacred fire descended upon him, and gave to his words a power and convincing impulse such as cannot be understood by those who read the mere record of them. That he spoke from the very depth of his heart—that in spirit he rose into heavenly places, and looked upon things unspeakable in glory—

could not be doubted by those who lived with him. The fruit of this singleness of heart and spotlessness of life was seen in what had been accomplished by that little feeble colony. In a strange and savage country they lived at peace with all; and instead of clinging to their worldly goods, and seeking wealth and fame, as all other pioneer communities—instead of suffering from jealousies, mutual distrust, lust of individual gain—they had all needful things in common, and all superfluities were stored away for the benefit of others. The clog of riches was not even desired by them.

“How can it be?” spoke Father Fritz, with a luminous and indescribable smile upon his face. “When the Lord comes, no man may even go down into the house to fetch anything out? Is not that another way of saying that our hearts must be free and unfettered from the clog of deceitful riches. We must be looking upwards ever for the appearing of the Lord—not earthwards, to see what treasure we have accumulated here. The band of first-fruits, who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and stand redeemed from among men on Mount Zion, have every one of them virgin hearts. What does that mean, but that they are not wedded to the world, nor weighed down by its cares and riches? They are ready at a moment’s notice to answer the call of the Lord, and follow Him whithersoever He goeth. Is that not the aim and object of every Christian heart?—to be ready and waiting for the Lord, with *nothing* between us and Him. That

is how I read the Scriptures, and my children are one with me in this blessed and glorious hope !”

The men of the world answered nothing. The day for mockery and scorn of such things had not yet come. They regarded the father as a mystic as well as saint ; but they revered him for his singleness of heart, and would perhaps have followed him gladly had not other matters engrossed them. Father Zenobe slightly shook his head, as though a little uncertain whether there might not be some underlying heresy lurking in this doctrine, which Holy Church (so far as he was aware) did not advocate, save in a very vague and cursory fashion. But no one could fail to be impressed by the earnestness of Father Fritz’s language, nor by the heavenly expression upon his face.

“If all our priests and friars taught after such a fashion,” muttered Tonty to Boisrondet, “the world would be a different sort of place. I should not object to be a religious son myself.”

All this while they were descending the pathway towards the isthmus, and Father Fritz was answering La Salle’s inquiries as to how he had accomplished so much in the short space of two years.

“We received much friendly help from the Indians,” he answered, “particularly from the Kappas, who are my very dear children, and who begin to enter into a greater comprehension of the truths of Christianity than any of the natives I have yet met. We dwelt amongst them for a while upon our downward journey,

and they helped us to fix upon this favoured site, and to build our houses there. It was they who taught us the art of brick-making, and they hewed us timber from the woods. We ourselves were not idle. All worked with a will, and our reward was the rapidity with which we saw our houses rising round us. At first we used the square fort—as you call it—for a common dwelling-place; then when we had houses, we held our services there whilst the church was building. That was our last erection, for we wished it to be the best, and we had by that time learned more of the art of construction. Our maidens have woven hangings for it within, and our young men have made carved work to adorn it both within and without. Not a living being here but has contributed to the structure—and that of his best. Like the tabernacle in the wilderness, it is a free-will offering of love; and being this, it is doubly hallowed, and the presence of God abides continually upon us.”

Father Fritz went on to say that, although the little colony expected the arrival of La Salle and his company in a vague way—as they had been expecting it now for above a year—they had received no intimation of his being in the neighbourhood, and were not especially watching for him now. News of the appearance upon the river of a great company of white men and of Indians had been brought to Father Fritz by a hunting party returning home, as he was journeying, after his custom, to some of the outlying hamlets of the

Indians, where he had converts or inquirers or catechumens. From the description of the party, he felt certain that it could be no other than that of La Salle, and he had at once postponed his own visits, none of which were urgent for the moment, to give a welcome to his old friends, and to conduct them to his little colony, where so many were waiting to give him also a grateful welcome.

“And as to the river’s mouth—where is that?” asked La Salle eagerly. “Is it far distant? and do any great difficulties and dangers lie betwixt us and it?”

“No danger, save what you may encounter from the semi-hostile Quinipissas,” answered Father Fritz. “I myself have navigated it more than once to the great gulf into which it empties itself. It is as you have always surmised; it finds its way at last, amid a region of swampy land, and by three branches, into the Gulf of Mexico. The Quinipissas are the last tribe you will have to encounter, and they have shown themselves jealous and distrustful of the white man. But if you will permit me to accompany you, I think you will not have serious trouble. They have never shown themselves as open enemies. They have never seriously threatened to disturb the home of peace.”

Father Fritz, in speaking of his colony, used an Indian name, the interpretation of which was “Home of Peace.” It appeared that the Indians had bestowed it upon the little colony, soon after its establishment amongst them, and it had gradually come to be adopted

by the community, and now the Home of Peace was its distinctive appellation.

Gaspard, despite the earnestness with which he listened to all this, felt wonderfully impatient for their arrival at the spot where Mayflower would be found awaiting him.

Suddenly a great stir appeared in the little enclosure, hitherto so quiet and still. The people were indoors partaking of their mid-day meal, and had been unaware of the approach of the party. Now some children running out first, gave a shout of wonder, and in a moment the place was alive with human forms, and the sound of English and French voices rent the air in exclamations of wonder and joy.

Father Fritz waved his hand in token of a happy recognition, and the next moment the gates which guarded the entrance to the isthmus were flung back, as the whole population streamed out to meet and welcome the new-comers.

Gaspard caught sight of a slim, girlish form in a fluttering white dress, and he was off like an arrow from a bow. The next minute he had Mary clasped tightly in his arms, shedding tears of joy as she felt his kisses on her face.

“Mayflower! my sweetest Mayflower! You have not forgotten me, then?”

“Gaspard! O Gaspard! as though I ever could!”

“Sweetheart, I have thought of you night and day.”

“Beloved, I have prayed for you without ceasing,

that you might be delivered from all perils, and that I might look upon your face again."

He strained her to his heart, and his answer was spoken with earnest gravity.

"And I have needed your prayers, my Mayflower, for I have been in perils many and great. There have been moments when I have said adieu to you in my thoughts, for it seemed as though I were never to look upon your sweet face again in this world. And yet God has brought me safely through all dangers, and I hold you once more in my arms!"

She hid her face, and her tears bedewed his breast, but they were tears of pure happiness.

"O my love, my love, thank God I have you safe! What perils brave men are called upon to endure! Would that you could be one of us in this sweet place! Methinks God has been very good in giving us this blessed asylum of peace wherein to wait, far from the turmoils and terrors of the great world around, for the fulfilment of His blessed promise!"

He understood her, and pressed kisses on her face.

"Thou shalt teach me more of thy hope, sweetheart, when our warfare is accomplished, and our commander has succeeded in the magnificent scheme to which he is pledged, and of which this happy little colony seems to be a sort of first-fruits. So long as he has to toil and labour, so long must I be his servant and follower. But we are young. We can wait for our happiness. Thou wilt be safe and happy in this blessed place, and

it will be to me as the goal to which to look forward when our object shall have been accomplished, and when each man may choose for himself the spot whereon he will make his home."

She looked at him wistfully, yet without reproach.

"Then thou canst not stay with us now?"

"I think not, dearest; not unless it be part of our commander's plan to reinforce the company here, and that I doubt. He, when once he has found the mouth of the river, and can report having traced the whole of its course, must return awhile to more northern latitudes, and communicate with Count Frontenac, and even with His Majesty of France. This is but the beginning. We have immense labours before us ere the giant enterprise shall be carried out. Yet fear not, my Mayflower, and be not faint-hearted, for I will return to thee yet, and we will spend our latter days in peace and happiness here; and that happiness will be but the greater for having been somewhat deferred."

"I may not seek to keep thee from thy duty, dear love," she answered, gently, "but my heart will oft-times be heavy with fears for thee."

Thus far had the lovers been alone and uninterrupted, but now they were surrounded by an eager group, and Gaspard found his hands taken and held by Louis—grown to be a wonderfully fine man of herculean proportions—whilst the eager, dark-eyed Ruvanni, with a child in her arms, gave him sisterly welcome. They bade him admire the fine eyes of the infant Gaspard, and

the Neville brothers pressed round him to give him welcome, and hear his adventures since last they had been together.

The women in the houses below, who had not rushed out, were busy preparing a meal for the travellers in one of the most spacious rooms of this comfortable home. It was indeed to the house of Father Fritz that they were taken, where a long guest-room was always in readiness; though, for the most part, the unexpected bands of visitors to be entertained were Indians returning from, or going forth to, their hunting-grounds.

The travellers cast curious glances round them as they passed through the gates, and along the sheltered veranda of the long street—if such a name could be given it—the pillars of which were wreathed with a wealth of flowering creepers breathing forth sweet odours. The sun was by this time very hot, but beneath the veranda and under the thatched roof of the guest-chamber it was cool and pleasant, and the murmur of the river in their ears made a perpetual rippling music.

It was wonderful to the travellers to be served by white women, to sit to a civilized meal with the implements to which they had so long been strangers, and to hear the familiar intonation of soft feminine voices.

La Salle told his hosts of all the perils and troubles which had beset him, and spoke very fully of his enterprise, its enormous scope, and the difficulties

with which it was surrounded. But although he gave full heed to these, and never sought to ignore them, his heart was filled with confidence and hope, and he was possessed by a great certainty that the worst of his troubles were now over.

In a few days more he would have actually navigated the river from source to mouth, and could set at defiance the lies and insinuations of his enemies. He had done a great work amongst the Indians, and had won all the great southern and western tribes over to his interest. In Canada, troubles and difficulties might still lie before him. But once let him open a method of transport direct from the mouth of the Mississippi to the French ports, and he could snap his fingers at Canada and the Iroquois, and carry out a gigantic commerce which should enrich his king and country, and render his name famous for ever in the annals of history.

CHAPTER XX.

DOWN TO THE SEA.

IT was upon a Saturday that La Salle and his company had arrived at the Home of Peace. He had arranged with the rest of his party to meet him upon the Monday morning, an hour after daybreak, at a certain island in the river described to them by Father Fritz as a suitable rendezvous. Tonty, Boisrondet, the Dautrays, and one or two more had accompanied him upon his expedition to this small pioneer colony; and, as soon as they had finished their meal, La Salle was eager to look round him, and especially to inspect the stores of furs and skins ready for export to France, when once he should be able to navigate a vessel either down the river to fetch them, or across the seas to its mouth.

Father Fritz therefore led the way back towards the square solid building, and there the travellers beheld, in the first instance, grand stores of golden grain, more than enough to last the whole community until the harvest should be ripe once more. Flax and hemp, straw and hay, and various sorts of edible roots, were

lying in heaps, in orderly fashion in the great magazine. No count was taken of the store, each household took what it required; and in times of scarcity—which certainly seemed likely to be few and far between—these people had always enough to give to their Indian neighbours, who were less provident. La Salle, whose stores were running low, was promised a bountiful supply whenever he chose to come for it, and he decided to accept the generous offer upon his return journey up the river again, which would be far more tedious and arduous than the voyage now just past.

Then the party was conducted up a winding stairway, ingeniously contrived, and into a great upper room, where a stove had been erected to ensure dryness during the heavy tropical rains which, at certain times of the year, deluged the place, and made an atmosphere of hot, steamy moisture, which was detrimental to the preservation of stores.

Here, upon long shelves, were laid layer upon layer of costly furs: beaver furs from the north, brought down by wandering Indians, who bartered them for golden grain, or brought them as freewill offerings to their friends of the Home of Peace; soft, well-dressed skins of deer, buffalo, lynx, wild cat, and many a nameless denizen of the forest, brought in by their own people, and prepared by them in the slack seasons of the year. Wonderful feather ornaments, manufactured by the skilful fingers of the younger women, and whole carefully-removed skins of strange and bright-hued

birds, all prepared and preserved with the greatest care, ready for exportation to Europe. In one corner, too, stood a casket of carved wood, and within that was a small but increasing collection of jewels, such as came from time to time into the possession of the colonists, either through the Indians, or by discovery along the beds of rivers, or turned up by the plough from some ancient Indian burial-place. Some of these were exceedingly curious, and the eyes of La Salle brightened as he looked at them, and then round the walls of this storehouse.

“Do you really mean that you have laid by these things for us—for me and my countrymen to take away—and that you ask nothing in exchange for them?” he questioned once again.

“We have enough, and more than enough for ourselves,” replied Father Fritz. “It is our pleasure to prepare these furs for our brethren at home. You are welcome to them, and if they will help in the furthering of your plans, we shall all rejoice—that is, if good is to come from the colonization of this mighty realm by Christendom, and that we may hope will be soon. I doubt not that the younger men would tell you they would fain have an increased supply of arms and ammunition, so that they may hunt more freely, and feel better prepared against assaults from possible foes. But beyond this we have all, and more than we need.”

“You are wonderful people!” said La Salle, with earnest admiration in his eyes. “But you shall surely

have what you ask. Indeed it is part of my scheme that my vessels from France shall be laden with such things as are needful for the hunter and the warrior, whilst they return with the spoils of these mighty lands, which fetch such high prices in France. Why, I believe that a hundred thousand francs would not buy the contents of this room! It puts heart into me to find such true and generous friends!" And the reserved and distrustful La Salle suddenly held out his hand, and took that of Father Fritz in a close clasp, whilst there was even something like a moisture upon his eyelashes.

The father held the hand extended, and looked into the thin, careworn face of the commander with those penetrating yet tender eyes which seemed to read the very soul.

"My friend," he said in a low voice, he and La Salle being alone together at one end of the long room, "it has pleased Almighty God to give to you a great genius, a stout heart, and a dauntless energy. These are great gifts, yet they can be misused if not employed above all things in His service. Take heed lest the love of this world's fame and glory come betwixt you and Him. Take heed lest the joy of exploring new lands, and opening a mighty commerce, transcend not the hope of seeing the kingdoms of this world gradually become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. In you He has found an instrument to His hand—be always submissive to that hand, and seek not to act without its guiding and leading. Think always of the Lord first,

and of self last. Remember to cherish the hope of His coming and kingdom, which blessed promise cannot fail. Be true to Him, and then thou wilt be true to thine own self and to every man; and may He give to thee the help without which we can do nothing, and such need of success and glory as He knows to be best."

La Salle bent his head, and a tear stood in his eye. For a moment a wave of most unwonted emotion swept over him.

"Pray for me, father," he answered hoarsely; "pray for me always. For I oftentimes forget to pray for myself, and I fear me that I stand in greater perils than those from the tomahawks of Indians, or from the machinations of jealous countrymen."

Father Fritz looked earnestly at him as he answered,—
"I do, my son, and I will, unceasingly. Thou dost speak truth indeed. It is not the foes from without whom we have most to dread. It is those things that come from within. They, defiling the heart and spirit of man, are the deadliest foes that he can have to combat. But to know and feel that this is so, is one step towards successfully repelling such foes."

Gaspard meantime, with his arm about Mary, and Claude straying upon her other side, was exploring the limits of the little settlement, and wandering away across the bridge, into the great rolling meadow and cornlands beyond.

The coolness of the evening was coming, and all was very beautiful. Mary spoke to them freely of her

happy life in this peaceful place, of the wonderful change wrought upon all the young men by Father Fritz's presence and teaching, and the contentedness of the whole community.

"He is such a saint, that sometimes I fear lest he will not be left to us much longer," she said. "There are moments when, as he stands before us, sometimes in the church, sometimes out in the open air, talking to us, and speaking of the glories of that kingdom for which he is waiting and watching, the light falls upon his beautiful white hair, and upon his saintly face, till it seems as though he were transfigured before us. I hold my breath sometimes, for it seems as though he would be taken away from us as he stands—as though the chariot of fire and the horses of fire must be close at hand to carry him away! And, O Gaspard! to think that at any moment—if the Lord were to come—that wondrous change might pass upon all who are waiting and watching for Him! Oh, dear love, think of it morning and night! Do not be one who mockingly says, 'My Lord delayeth His coming.' Be not as a virgin whose lamp has gone out for lack of oil. If we are sundered for a while in body, let us know ourselves one in spirit; and if the Lord should come ere we meet again in the flesh, let it not be said of us that one shall be taken and the other left!"

There was something like a sob in her voice as she spoke these last words, and Gaspard clasped her in his arms in a sudden transport of affection.

“Dear love, dearest love!” he cried passionately, “teach me to see and believe as thou dost, and then indeed we can fear no evil, for we shall know ourselves safe in the unity of the Spirit.”

“You shall hear Father Fritz speak to us of it on the morrow,” she answered, with tears of happiness in her eyes. “Oh, we love our peaceful, happy Sundays here, when we all gather together to read and pray, and receive his teaching and the blessed sacrament! Oh, how I have longed that you should be with us, if it were only for once!”

Father Zenobe was a little shocked and scandalized to hear upon the morrow that it was not exactly mass that would be celebrated in the church.

“My flock,” answered Father Fritz, with his gentle smile, “are for the most part Protestants—Huguenots. While seeking to lead them to greater comprehension of, and loving reverence for the blessed sacrament, I have sought also to teach them in that fashion which reaches their understanding and touches their hearts most nearly. The Latin tongue is unknown to them. They revolt from the thought of giving anything more than reverence to the Virgin Mother, and so long as they are willing, with all generations, to call her blessed, I ask no more of them. The Christian faith is full enough and wide enough to supply the needs of all the faithful. The holy catholic church embraces within its arms all the baptized without distinction. That, brother, I have always maintained, albeit I have been

called heretic for so doing. There is but one baptism, in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and whosoever receives it is a member of Christ's body from that time forth—our part is to minister to him, and teach him to walk worthy of his calling, and not to fall away from the standing into which he has been brought."

Father Zenobe slightly shook his head, though not attempting to argue the matter out, having something of a fear that Father Fritz, with the Word of God at his fingers' ends, might get the best of the discussion. La Salle burst into a slight laugh, and laid his hand on the friar's shoulder, saying,—

"Father Fritz has reached a conclusion which you priests of Rome are slow to believe, that the catholic church of Christ is a wider covenant than the Church of Rome of the Popes. For my own part, I believe that he is in the right of it, and that if we are to convert the heathen world, it must be by weapons more powerful, and a comprehension more full and sympathetic, than can be claimed by you holy men who will look to the Pope before you look to the Lord."

Father Zenobe hastily crossed himself, as though fearful that his ears had listened to some subtle blasphemy, whilst others looked at La Salle in amaze, for he was a man who very seldom spoke on such themes, albeit accounted a worthy son of the church. As for Father Fritz, his calm and beautiful face glowed with

that radiance which comes from within, as he said in his quiet, earnest way,—

“Yes; we must look first to Christ, yet let us beware, even in so doing, of rejecting those whom He hath sent to minister His word of truth. He hath set in the church His ministering servants. To reject these, and to seek to minister the things of God ourselves, may be as great a rejection of His ordinances as to forget to look to Him above all other. Satan tempts men by many a subtle device to fall into error, and to be snared in the devices of their own heart. But the Word of the Lord is a sure and safe lamp in the darkness. If we will but take it *all*—one part with another, rejecting naught, and giving no undue supremacy to one part over another, then indeed shall we find that, little by little, it will guide us into *all* truth.”

It would be hard, indeed, for any sincere believer not to be impressed by the service held in the beautiful little church upon that Sunday morning. The sun shone in through a row of small pointed apertures, which took the place of windows high up above the heads of the people, and fell upon woven hangings wrought in many a mystic and symbolic device, and upon cunning carvings in wood that displayed the loving care and skill of many a trained hand. The hangings of the altar were very beautiful, and the holy vessels were all of gold—gold offered by the Indians themselves, and consecrated to the service of God with their wondering and awed consent.

The congregation was more than half composed of Indians, who flocked thither from their camps around, eager to hear Father Fritz discourse, and to be instructed in the tenets of the faith which was beginning to illumine the darkness of their hearts. Father Fritz differed from his Romanist brethren in that he was very slow to baptize. The Jesuits sought rapid conversions and consent to the rite, and then perhaps the newly-baptized person was left for months or even years unvisited and untaught, till, as a natural result, he relapsed into heathendom, from which he had not really been plucked.

Father Fritz would baptize none, till he was assured that those desirous of the holy rite had grasped some real and true comprehension of the baptismal standing of the Christian, and were really in earnest in desiring it. Thus it was that his converts appeared very slow in their advance, and very few in numbers; but once made, they were likely to stand fast in the faith, for their hearts and spirits were truly touched and stirred before they were permitted to enter the fold of the Christian church.

The service compiled by Father Fritz for the use of his flock was very simple and beautiful. It comprised prayers derived from ancient sources, many of them common to the Romish Mass and the English Prayer-book, some taken from each of these sources, some from liturgies more ancient still, with which Father Fritz was intimately acquainted. All were simple, beautiful, devotional, and evidently familiar to the congregation,

who devoutly responded, and listened with great attention to the whole service. The discourse, or sermon, was given in the Indian tongue, now familiar to all, and was a homely exposition of the simple but infinitely mysterious doctrines of the Christian faith, combined with an earnest entreaty to those gathered together before him not to forget the hope and the promise of the coming of the Lord, and to seek to be found ready at any moment should He appear.

Thanksgiving was made in the appropriate place for the safety of their brethren from the perils of the long journey, and they were commended to the mercy and protection of the Lord for the remainder of that arduous undertaking.

Then the Indians were dismissed with a blessing, save the few who had been baptized; and the holy communion was administered to the remainder of the congregation, La Salle and all his party reverently receiving it, and with great joy.

Father Zenobe was again somewhat shocked and scandalized to note that the cup was given to all alike, and offered a gentle remonstrance at the close of the service.

Father Fritz looked at him with his direct and luminous glance as he replied,—

“Yes, my brother, I know well all that you would say. I have spent many an hour of prayer and supplication upon my knees for light and guidance in these matters, for the grace of obedience as well as for the

illumination of spirit which shall enable me rightly to discern the purposes of God. But the answer seemed to me so plain that I could not but obey. Our Lord took the cup and gave it to His disciples, and said, 'Drink ye *all* of it.' After that how dare we say to brother or to sister, 'Thou shalt not drink'?"

"Well, well, well," answered Father Zenobe, with good-humoured tolerance, "I will say no more. Out in these lone wilds thou art safe enough. And perhaps it matters little. But take my advice, and stay here amid thine own flock; for if thou dost venture with these crazes of thine within the territory of the Pope, or within the pale of the church, methinks thou wilt find thyself quickly in some noisome dungeon, if thou dost not suffer at the stake for a blasphemous heretic."

Gaspard and his brothers, standing not far away, chanced to hear these words, and exchanged meaning glances. There rose up within their hearts a sudden sense of revolt and indignation against a system of spiritual tyranny which could condemn to death such a man as Father Fritz for obeying the clear commands of God, because they did not conform to the traditions of man. It seemed to make a new severance for them from the life of the Old World long left behind. Never had they felt any real desire to return thither. Now it seemed as though their destiny were finally settled. They would, when their duty to La Salle was at an end, return hither to this peaceful spot, ruled in fatherly love by Father Fritz, and here would they spend their days,

seeking no earthly riches and aggrandizement, but learning day by day how to grow in grace, and in patient waiting for the fulfilment of the promises of God.

Upon the morrow all was stir and excitement in the little colony. Although most of its inhabitants had, at one time or another, been down in canoes as far as the mouth of the mighty river, it was felt that there was something altogether different in this journey of La Salle's; and those who could be spared for a few days from their homes eagerly volunteered to accompany the party.

La Salle was glad enough to be so accompanied. The presence of Father Fritz and a few of his men would ensure immunity from the hostilities of the Quinipissas, and the sight of recruits would enliven the expectations and hopes of his own men.

Louis and his wife were amongst those who desired to come, and Mary pleaded so earnestly to be present at the projected planting of the standard that she was permitted to join the party, she and Ruvanni, however, being the only women taken.

Mary was as light of foot as of old, and walked beside Gaspard step for step upon the hour's march that divided them from the river. Here they quickly joined the rest of their party, and a gay and prosperous voyage commenced down the rapid and ever-widening river, which seemed to be growing impatient to pour itself into the ocean beyond.

They had no hostile encounters with the Quinipissas,

although they saw dusky men in canoes hovering about, and heard the roll of the drum amongst the cane brake on the river banks.

Once Father Fritz landed, and was met by one of the chiefs, who professed great interest in the white strangers, and promised that they should not be molested.

Some men, landing in search of game one day, were met by a shower of arrows shot from behind a wooded knoll; but they retired to their canoe unhurt, and La Salle, whose policy it was to keep the peace all along the river banks, ordered his men away, and kept at a safe distance from the Indians for the future, hoping thus to disarm their jealousy, and to show them that no evil was intended.

At the very close of the voyage the river divided itself into three channels, and the canoes divided, some taking one passage, and others the remaining two.

The Dautray family, with Ruvanni and Mary, were the occupants of one canoe, and they followed the eastern branch, Father Fritz and La Salle taking the western, and Tonty and Boisrondet the centre one. The rest of the canoes divided as they would, following in the wake of the leading vessels.

The water of the river had been growing gradually brackish. Now Mary, trailing her hand in the water, and from time to time putting it to her lips, declared it to be salter than anything she had imagined possible. The shores on either bank became more marshy and sedge-grown. The wind, which blew from time to time

in their faces, had that crisp freshness which bespeaks the proximity of the sea.

The young men plied their paddles with renewed vigour. Mary stood up in the bow, shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing earnestly and eagerly before her. Far away there seemed to stretch out before her eyes a thin blue line. White gulls began to wheel above their heads, uttering their strange, harsh cries, and seeming to question the right of this flotilla to enter their hunting grounds.

Suddenly the girl exclaimed,—

“The sea! the sea! I am sure it is the sea!”

And lo! in a few more minutes the low, unmistakable sound of the booming of waves along the shore was borne to their ears by the light breeze.

Down and down they went, the channel still turning and twisting in a tortuous course, although the waters were salt as the sea itself, and the splash of the in-rolling tide could plainly be heard.

Then came a thin line of surf, over which the canoe shot bravely. The motion changed to a peculiar rocking, which caused Ruvanni to cling instinctively to Louis, though Mary laughed as if rejoicing in the motion.

“The sea! the sea!” she cried triumphantly. “Am I not a true daughter of England, for I feel as though I were on my native element, albeit I have never seen the white crested waves before! Oh, beautiful sea! Oh, glorious sea! How I love you! Saw you anything so strangely grand before?”

Ere the close of that day the flotilla had gathered together in the great river's mouth. La Salle's giant task was accomplished! He had navigated the mighty river from source to mouth. He had proved beyond all doubt that what he had long set his heart upon was no fancy of a diseased imagination. He had set himself a colossal, but not an impossible task. Success—the first taste of that sweet nectar—had been his at last. Now, with renewed courage and a fresh heart, he would be able to return and gather together the needful resources for the carrying out of his magnificent scheme.

One day more was spent by him in coasting about the river's mouth, prospecting for the best harbourage for vessels. Meantime some of his men were hewing down a tree, and forming of it a colossal column which was to play a part in the ceremony of the morrow.

Upon this column, on the day following, were solemnly fixed the arms of France, together with the following inscription,—

LOUIS LE GRAND, ROI DE FRANCE ET DE NAVARRE,
RÉGNE: LE NEUVIÈME AVRIL 1682.

As La Salle, pointing to the inscription, read out these words, a volley of musketry was fired, and the company broke into loud cheering, and cries of, "Vive le Roi!" The Indians stared in silent admiration and amazement, whilst the column was placed in position to the accompaniment of renewed plaudits; and immedi-

ately afterwards the "Te Deum" was solemnly chanted, together with other hymns of thanksgiving.

Then La Salle, advancing to the column, laid his hand upon it, and, in a loud voice, proclaimed that, in the name of the great King Louis, and by virtue of the commission held from him, he took possession of all this great territory, henceforward to be known as Louisiana, with its harbours, seas, bays, rivers, its peoples, provinces, fisheries, mines and minerals, its towns, villages, and provinces, and that this territory extended all along the Mississippi, the Missouri, the Ohio, from the sources of these rivers to this spot where they discharged into the Gulf of Mexico; and that from henceforth no European may lay claim to any of these lands, which are taken lawful possession of by the King of France through him that day.

After this comprehensive and simple annexation of a territory of this enormous magnitude, La Salle concluded his speech amid salvos of musketry and loud vivas of the people, and, after another hymn had been sung, at the instigation of Father Fritz—the grand "Vexilla Rex,"—

"The banners of Heaven's king advance,
The mystery of the cross shines forth,"

the little party broke up, and separated to their canoes, leaving behind them the lonely column, standing in the broad sunshine of the marshy desert, a strange tribute to the ambition and the perseverance of man.

CHAPTER XXI.

DAYS OF REST.

“**T**HOU art a good and trusty lad. I value the services of all of you Dautrays too much to dispense with them. I cannot say, ‘Go, settle in the Vale of Peace, marry, and live happily there from thenceforth.’”

“Nay, sir,” interposed Gaspard, eagerly, “that would I not do, even though you did give me permission. I know that our task is yet but commenced. I would not leave your service at such a moment as this.”

La Salle in his turn lifted his hand with a smile, as though to impose silence upon the eager youth. Gaspard checked the words on his lips, and the commander continued to speak,—

“I know that thou wouldst not do any such thing. I have tested thy fidelity, and that of thy father and brothers, many a time ere now. It was a kind freak of Dame Fortune’s which sent me such recruits as you have been, when least I looked for such. Mine own sworn followers have failed me again and yet again, and many are there in this present company whom I

cannot trust. But all who bear your name have proved themselves stanch and true; and La Salle, if not a man of many words, is not unobservant — does not forget.”

“Sir, we have but striven to do our duty,” said Gaspard, beneath his breath, as one who disclaims praise.

La Salle smiled his slight, enigmatic smile.

“And how many be there in this world who do as much? Nay, lad, I will not praise thee more, since thou dost tingle with honest shame at hearing thyself lauded. Long may it be so with thee! But listen once again. Albeit I cannot part from thee altogether, I would not be a harsh taskmaster. I would not show myself ungrateful towards one who has been ever faithful to me. It has been told to me that thou art betrothed to the bright-haired maiden, Mary Neville, who dwells at the Home of Peace?”

“True, sir,” answered Gaspard, with glowing cheek. “We have loved each other almost since we met; but she will wait till our task is accomplished, and you have no further need of my services, ere we speak of wedding one another.”

“I have heard that also. It is more than most men would give up for my sake, and again I thank thee. But now to what I desire to say. This voyage up the river with so large a company must needs be tedious. It will take us weeks, if not months, to gain our goal at Fort Miami. Thou and thy brothers are expert with

the paddle, and excellent strong fellows, friendly with the Indians, and well versed in their ways. Swanalulu, your servant, is true to the core. Then why not remain for a week, or even two, at ease and rest in the Home of Peace, and then follow us swiftly in your light and well-manned canoe? You would reach us long ere we had accomplished our journey; for we shall certainly be detained by friendly Indians for feasts, even if no more serious hindrances beset us. You have my free leave for this well-earned spell of rest and peace. Take it, good lads, and enjoy it to the full; and when the time has passed that I have named, follow us up the river, and join us there. It may well be that we shall halt a while to rest and victual afresh at Fort Prud'homme. Seek, then, to meet us again there. Since the river is our highway, we need not fear to miss each other."

Gaspard's face glowed with pleasure at this welcome prospect. He had never thought of asking such a thing. It had never entered his head to separate himself from the rest of the company, and remain behind in the happy valley with Father Fritz and the colony there. But the prospect thus opened out by La Salle's words was delightful to him. He saw at once how easy it would be, by the exercise of strength and skill, to catch up the large party of canoes. It had often chafed him as it was to watch the tardy progress of the Indians, who could not be made to estimate time at its true value, and who were constantly lagging behind,

often for a whole day. Experience and the resolve to keep on good terms with his allies had taught patience to La Salle and his company, and they put up good-temperedly enough with the hindrance, which was inevitable, and strove to make light of the annoyance it caused from time to time.

But certainly there would be no difficulty about gaining a fortnight of delightful rest and happiness in the colony which was Mary's home, and joining the party by the time they reached Fort Prud'homme.

Gaspard rushed off to his brothers to tell them of the permission thus graciously volunteered, and Claude's eyes brightened like stars as he listened. But Jules said nothing, only stood looking down in thoughtful attitude; and when he spoke at last, it was to say,—

“It is a gracious and a kindly thought; it is like our noble commander. You stay on, brothers, and take your fill of happiness when it comes in your way. But as for me, I will go with him. I have learned to love him with so great a love, that I am not happy away from him. Where he goes, there will I go. I have no wish but to serve him. It has been joy indeed to be together all this while, but I am only truly happy when I can see his face, and hear his voice, and feel that I am serving him. Therefore I will go with him, and not remain behind here.”

Gaspard was not surprised. He had long noted Jules's doglike devotion to La Salle. During the time that they had been parted, just before the commencement of

this enterprise, Jules had been restless, anxious, sometimes almost morose. La Salle was one of those men who attracted the personal love of few ; but those who did give it to him, gave it in no stinted measure.

Jules had not the same strong affection for Father Fritz that possessed the hearts of Gaspard and Claude, who had been so much with him at the susceptible period of their life. He revered and respected him ; but the desire to be within reach of him and his teaching was nothing like the desire to be with La Salle, and to act as his servant upon every possible occasion.

The party had returned to the Home of Peace, after having planted the standard of possession at the mouth of the Mississippi. They had remained there nearly a week, taking in the generous stores of provisions made ready for them. Now they were about to start forth upon their arduous task of ascending the river in frail canoes. But success is a wonderful tonic, and the thought of what they had at last accomplished had put heart and spirit into all, and there was no murmuring and no discontent in the ranks as yet—a wonderful thing for any party headed by the saturnine and silent La Salle.

So upon the morrow there was a great gathering beside the river banks. Mary, with a face glowing with joy in the thought of the reprieve granted her in the parting with her betrothed, pressed up to La Salle, as he stood watching the embarkation of his company, and presented to him a bouquet of beautiful flowers,

which she had sought amid the rocks of the valley, and had arranged with a wonderful artistic taste.

He turned at the pressure of her light fingers on his arm, and his dark face softened as he met the mild glances of her appealing eyes. He took the flowers with a gesture of thanks, and then looking down into her fair face, he said,—

“And so thou art to be the bride of Gaspard Dautray one day, fair maiden?”

“I trust and hope so, if it be the will of God,” answered Mayflower, with simple directness and childlike candour.

“The woman who weds him will have a true and faithful husband,” said La Salle, with an approving glance at Gaspard, who stood by. “Strive to be as true and as faithful as he has shown himself to be, and you will be happier than most women upon this earth can call themselves.”

He took the girl's hand in his, raised it to his lips in the customary salutation of his nation, gave a warm clasp to Gaspard, and stepped into the canoe held for him by Jules.

“So thou wilt not remain with thy brothers, my trusty comrade?” he said, with a kindly gleam in his sombre eyes.

“I would sooner be with thee, sir,” was Jules's brief answer, and the next moment he had sprung into the light craft, and had seized a paddle with the skill of an Indian.

The canoe shot out into the water—the last of the little flotilla. The crowd gathered on the banks gave a hearty cheer. Mary looked after the vessel bearing away La Salle, with a mist of tears in her eyes.

“What is it, sweetheart?” asked Gaspard, softly.

“I can scarce tell; but my heart is heavy within me. He is a great man and has a noble heart; yet something tells me that misfortune and failure lie before him. I fear me that I shall look upon his grand face no more.”

“Nay, be not a prophetess of evil, dear love,” said Gaspard, with playful raillery. “Think of all that he has accomplished in the teeth of so many and great difficulties. Is not that an earnest of a greater success to come?”

Mary’s eyes were turned towards the vanishing canoes. They were wistful and dreamy still.

“I scarce know. My heart misgives me. Sometimes I wonder whether it will be God’s will to crown with full success great enterprises which have so little of Him in their scope. Men talk indeed of converting the Indians to the faith of Christ; but methinks that far more do they desire to win fame and wealth for themselves and the king of France. I heard much talk from yon bold men whilst they were here. They talked freely to our people; but it was all of the trade to be established, and the stores of wealth that were to be transported across the seas. It seemed to us that there was little other than this in their minds. How, then,

can God be other than grieved and sad to find Himself so much forgotten?"

Gaspard had no reply to make. Had he not felt the same again and yet again? True, the interest and excitement of the daily life, and the nobility and generosity of character displayed by men like Tonty, Boissardet, La Salle, and many others, diverted his thoughts continually from the selfishness and sordidness of the bulk of the adventurers. But, stripped of all high-sounding phrases, and of all the unintentional hypocrisies engendered by the notion that the few friars accompanying such expeditions were going to convert the countless tribes of Indians to the faith of Christ, the purpose of these adventurers was little more than a system of organized plunder and robbery. The Indians were to pour their stores of valuable furs and skins into the lap of Europe, in return for the murderous weapons and fiery spirits which were already commencing to be the curse of their race, and which would in time exterminate them from the face of the earth. Had not the sale of drink in Canada become such a curse that enactment after enactment was passed to endeavour to put a check upon it; yet was it not known that the very Jesuits and priests who openly condemned it, carried it on themselves in secret, because it was such a source of profit to those engaged in it? And now, would not this curse be brought by La Salle's vessels to the untainted tribes of the south? Had he not heard Father Fritz solemnly warning La Salle of the possible consequences

of his scheme, if he could not show himself a man of iron, and hold the accursed traffic in check ?

La Salle himself was of noble nature, only desirous of his country's welfare, and the civilization and elevation of this vast continent. His ambition was not sordid in character. If he desired fame, he did not crave after wealth. He would truly strive that good, and not evil, should follow upon the steps of his mighty enterprise ; but, as Father Fritz sadly asked him, had he the power to stem the tide of avarice and greed which would burst in upon the country like a flood so soon as the new highway was opened, and the riches of the Indian lands poured out into the Gulf of Mexico ?

Gaspard had heard some of this talk, and Mary also. It seemed to throw a shadow over their present happiness. But soon the shadow was for the time forgotten. It was such joy to be together, to wander hand in hand through the sunny valley, to sit at the feet of Father Fritz and listen to his teaching, and to think of the day, even though it might be long delayed, when they would be together, united in the holy bonds of wedlock—one flesh, even as they felt sometimes that they were already one spirit.

The days fled by, all too fast for the lovers ; but they were days of rest and refreshment. Sometimes Mary and Gaspard and Claude would accompany Father Fritz on his visits to the Indian hamlets, where he was welcomed with joy and reverence. Mary was well known in all the homesteads of the valley, and had come to be

the friend of the Indian girls and women to a remarkable extent.

These Indians were all more or less under the influence of Christianity, and were seeking to fathom some of its unfathomable truths.

“Is it possible for them to understand our creed?” Gaspard asked once, after he had been seeking to reply to some earnest but not too intelligible queries from a young chief.

“Is it possible for any one of us to understand the truth?” Father Fritz had replied, with his inward smile. “Can any of us understand the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, ascension, or glorification of the Lord? Not the greatest intellect upon the earth can fathom such depths, or understand the infinite mysteries of God. But the faith of a child can apprehend them, and faith is what is asked of us, not comprehension. Even these benighted heathens can little by little be brought to the faith. It is a slow process. Distrust, deceit, vice, and selfish greed are deeply implanted in their natures. But the germ of the divine is in them, even as in us. At last they come—if they are in earnest—to a glimmering of what faith and true love mean; and when that is reached, the rest follows as a matter of course. For when once the light of God can penetrate, He takes the work out of our feeble hands and does it Himself instead. Then indeed we bow our heads in thankfulness, and the angels rejoice over the lost one found.”

And Gaspard himself bowed the head in reverence and

a new sense of comprehension, and began to think he better understood the failure of the good friars who had accompanied the expedition, and who had so bitterly complained that they could make no way with the Indians, their ignorance and depravity were so invincible; for they appeared to lack the insight, and human sympathy, and almost divine patience, in dealing with them which were so characteristic of Father Fritz.

“When we think for a moment of what infinite value every human soul is in the eye of Almighty God,” he once said to Gaspard, “how can we cease to care for each one of these degraded heathen, even as for a beloved brother? If the Redeemer of the world came down to die for them as well as for us, how can we stand aside afar off, and stretch out no hand to draw them within reach of that atonement in which to believe is to find salvation? True, the Almighty may have mysterious ways of dealing with the heathen world which He has not revealed unto us; but He has given the church a command which may not lightly be set aside—preach the gospel to every creature.”

Gaspard, Claude, and their father—who had taken the place of his son when Jules declined the proffered favour of a fortnight’s rest, preferring to remain with his master—studied with close attention the workings of this little colony on the river. For, if the scheme of planting a chain of forts along the mighty river’s banks became anything beyond a dream in the mind of a man of genius, what model could be better than that

presented before them in this peaceful and thriving community.

And yet, as Jean Dautray said to his sons, towards the close of their happy visit,—

“My heart misdoubts me that we shall ever see the like again. Where can we find men willing to sink all thoughts of private wealth and aggrandizement, and live for each other and for the Lord as they do here? How different is the spirit of the world! What power will suffice to leaven the sinful mass of self-seeking humanity with which we are surrounded? If in every priest and friar we could find a Father Fritz, perhaps more might be done. Yet he would say that to put faith in him, instead of in the Lord he serves, is a great and terrible error. Alas! I fear me we shall never see the like of this spot again. Yet the commander has high hopes of planting a cordon of such colonies all along the great waterway.”

The youths were to the full as much aware as their father of the difference in spirit which existed in these people and in the adventurers who formed La Salle's company. Honest and brave men were not lacking amidst these latter; yet in every heart the hope of personal advantage was the ruling passion. La Salle himself was perhaps of all men the most ambitious, albeit his ambition was of a less selfish and self-seeking kind. But the same taint was upon all; it was not the honour and glory of God which was their first and great concern, but the aggrandizement of self or of country.

Here the atmosphere was altogether different. Self was sunk in brotherly love for all men, even for the degraded Indians and for their foes, most of whom had been disarmed by the gentleness and kindness received. And over all and above all was the ardent desire to do in all things the will of the Lord, and to be ready to receive Him at His coming, and to pray that that coming might be near at hand.

“I fear me we shall never see that spirit working amongst our company,” said Dautray with a sigh; but Claude looked at him with something of Father Fritz’s burning light in his eyes as he made answer,—

“Dear father, if others will not think of the Lord, and seek Him and His ways first, at least let us try ourselves to be true and faithful in all things. Every one can seek to bring the Lord’s kingdom a little nearer to the earth by keeping His commandments, and striving in all things to do His holy will.”

“True, my son, most true,” answered Dautray, gravely and earnestly. “May He give us grace to hold closely to Him; for I sometimes fear that there be dark days awaiting us, and that perils of many sorts will beset and surround us ere we see the goal of our hopes.”

The spirits of the youths were more sanguine than that of the father, who perhaps had seen more of the temper of La Salle’s men, and knew better the difficulties that beset all operations when success has to be deferred, and a time of patient waiting endured.

Gaspard was full of joyous anticipation of glad days

to come, when La Salle's purposes should become actual fact, when the chain of forts and colonies should spring up along the great river's banks, and when he could return to this Home of Peace, and settle himself there with his sweet young wife, to a life of simple toil and tranquillity of spirit, such as seemed to him the best existence possible to a human being in this sinful and troublous world.

Mary shared all his aspirations and longings, and spoke with eager joy of his return, which might perhaps be looked for, if all went well, in another year, or at latest two.

The White Mayflower, as he was fond of calling her, had one little fear and trouble on her own account, which, during the last days of their visit, she confided to her betrothed.

This trouble was a growing conviction and fear that the greatest and most powerful of the Quinipissa chieftains desired her for the wife of his eldest son.

This youth was kept apart in a strange sort of barbaric splendour. It was said that he was white—almost as white as the denizens of the Home of Peace. There were whispers that his mother had been “a daughter of the sun-god”—a woman dazzlingly fair. Most likely she had been some Spanish or English woman of great fairness and beauty, captured by the Indians in some raid into Florida or Mexico. There were by this time small colonies of adventurous Europeans in many parts of the New World, and from time to time

there was an admixture of white blood in that of the Indian races.

However that might be, rumour declared that this youth was as white as any child of the sun, and that his father meant to find for him a white maiden as a bride, to rear up a race of beings half divine by nature, who should rule all the sun-worshipping tribes of the south by the power of their beauty and divinity.

Several times had this old chieftain—the father—visited the Home of Peace, under pretext of desiring to learn more of the doctrines of Christianity. But this Mary believed to be only a pretext.

“And Father Fritz knows that he is false,” she added, earnestly. “Never have I heard him speak so sternly as he doth to yon wily old man. He can read through his crafty soul, and he knows that in his heart he is but mocking. Methinks his words would scathe and pierce the heart of any not hardened in sin; but as for him—he sits and smiles, and fixes his eyes first upon one of our maidens, and then upon another; for he presents himself from time to time at the church, and from the house of God none may be shut out, albeit they come with evil thoughts in their hearts. Of late I have noted that his eyes dwell more oft upon me than upon any other, and twice he has sought to speak with me, but I have shrunk from him in fear and loathing. It may be nought but my fantasy, yet there comes a fear into my heart lest he should desire to have me for the wife of his son. He looks like a man who, by

subtlety and guile, if not by force, could accomplish many things. And sometimes my heart sinks with fear at the thought of what may chance to me."

Gaspard caught her in his arms, and pressed her close to his heart.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart, such words fall like a weight upon my spirit. Hast thou spoken of this to any other? Hast thou told thy fear to Father Fritz?"

"Yes," responded Mary, simply, "and since I spoke he has visited the city of the Quinipissas, and the old chieftain has been seen here no more. My brothers also know, and they declare that they will not permit any Quinipissa to approach me. I am foolish to fear; and when thou art beside me, or when Father Fritz is amongst us, then indeed I can smile at my nervous terrors. But sometimes when he is gone from hence, and when our people are busy hither and thither about the fields, and I find myself in moments of forgetfulness somewhat far from home and in some lonely meadow, perchance, then a wave of fear comes over me, and I fly hastily homewards, scarce daring to look behind me, for I fear that every hillock may hide a lurking foe, and I resolve that I will never again cross the river alone."

"Ay, sweetheart, promise me that. Promise to use all care and discretion," cried Gaspard, urgently. "Me-thinks in this home of peace and rest thou must needs be safe. For my sake, as well as for thine own, stray not away from it alone. And even in the company of others be watchful, be cautious. Would that I needed

not to leave thee!—that I could take thee with me! But for the present that may not be, and duty calls me hence.”

“Yes, dear love, and I would not have thee disobey the call of duty through any fears for me. A safer place and a sweeter place than this could not be found upon God’s earth. We will daily pray to Him for each other. Methinks He will watch over and guard us both. And we will think of the happy time which we trust is in store, when we shall meet again, and shall not have to say adieu.”

This confidence of Mary’s troubled Gaspard’s parting somewhat, but he charged her brothers most seriously to guard her; and they, being somewhat of the same opinion regarding the desires of the cunning old chieftain, promised earnestly that every care should be taken. Force was not likely to be employed, and they would watch most carefully against any wile or stratagem. The chief’s son was but a lad. The Indian nature seldom hurried itself. The plan might not be abandoned for long, yet it might be long before any step was taken.

Gaspard might be certain that Mary should be guarded like the apple of the eye. None should be suffered to do her harm if loving care could shield her, and all the community loved her as a sister.

So he said adieu with a lightened heart, and with many promises of as speedy a return as duty permitted; and after obtaining the blessing of Father Fritz, the Dautrays set forth on their journey to join the company of La Salle once again.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DEADLY FOE.

THE light canoe containing the three Dautrays—father and sons—and the faithful Swanalulu sped up the current of the mighty Mississippi with tireless energy. After the welcome spell of rest and refreshment, all the travellers were in the most excellent health and spirits.

The days were becoming very hot, so they slept and rested for the most part between nine in the morning and five in the afternoon, and then taking to their canoe again, they drove it through the water throughout the glorious summer night of those southern latitudes, the stars overhead giving them ample light, and the four voyagers taking alternate shifts with the paddles and shooting along at a high rate of speed.

From time to time they fell in with friendly Indians, who gave them news of their party. They found they were gaining on them rapidly, as was likely to be the case; and they felt certain of reaching them by the time they had covered the distance of Fort Prud'homme.

They were now, perhaps, two days' journey from that

place—they were not sure of the exact locality—and were preparing to set out after their day's camping, when they saw a very small canoe shooting down the river at a marvellous speed, as though the Indian traveller were fleeing for his very life; and as he neared the party on the bank, Gaspard, who was steadily regarding him, exclaimed,—

“It is Nika! he must be bringing some message from La Salle or his party!”

Nika was a Shawanoe Indian, a hunter by calling, who had joined the party with his chief the previous autumn, and had attached himself to La Salle, much after the fashion that Nimrod had done. These two Indians attended him everywhere, ran errands for him, supplied his table with meat, and slept at the door of his tent when the party encamped.

Seeing him approaching thus at headlong speed, Gaspard felt certain he was the bearer of urgent tidings, and hailed to the man with all the force of his strong young voice, waving his arms and striving to attract his attention by every means in his power.

Although far away in the middle of the river where the current was strongest, the keen-sighted Indian at once observed the signals, and turning his canoe, shot towards the shore with all the strength he possessed.

“Bring you tidings of good or of evil?” cried Gaspard, as the man came within earshot; and the answer was one of those wailing sounds used by the natives to express sorrow and mourning.

Gaspard's cheek whitened with a sudden fear.

"Is it the commander?" he asked breathlessly, as he helped the exhausted Indian to step upon firm ground; and Nika, pulling a missive from the pouch at his side, thrust it into Gaspard's hands and sank face downwards upon the ground, still uttering wails expressive of a sorrow akin to despair.

Gaspard tore open the paper with trembling fingers. His father and brother pressed up to look. Swanalulu bent over Nika, and the two spoke together in their own tongue.

The words upon the paper were written by Jules, and were very few; for the youth was no scholar, although just able to write when necessity urged.

"Our commander is stricken by a deadly fever. He lies sick almost to death. Come quickly, as you value his life; for Father Fritz has taught you the use of the healing herbs. It may be ye can save him, if ye do but come in time. Hasten!"

That was all; but no more was needed. In a moment all was haste and eager confusion. Nika had explained to Swanalulu that La Salle was not yet at Fort Prud'homme, although they were seeking to convey him thither. He had been stricken with the fever above a week ago, but with his iron will and plenitude of strength he had fought against it to the last, and almost before his company realized that he was in any wise ailing, he had become so alarmingly prostrate that fears were entertained for his life.

Still retaining his powers of command, he had ordered the party to move onwards and upwards; and even, when forced himself to remain behind, he sent Tonty on with the bulk of the vessels, only permitting a few canoes to remain behind to accompany him. He had insisted upon making a short voyage each day, but was growing so alarmingly worse that his party had insisted upon a halt. Father Zenobe had issued commands to that effect, and now the sick man lay some five leagues away up the river, in a state that seemed like one of impending dissolution; and the last and only slender hope seemed to be in the possibility of obtaining some of those herbs and simples which Father Fritz had taught Gaspard and Claude to seek and decoct, and which were essential in allaying the fevers and malarias that prevailed at certain seasons along the swampy banks of the rivers in these latitudes.

Most fortunately Father Fritz had himself bethought him of the possibility of illness amongst the party, and before the Dautrays left, he had bestowed upon them a large quantity of such febrifuges and medicaments as were most likely to be wanted by the party during the next months.

There was therefore no delay to be suffered in the gathering of the herbs nor the preparation of them. They had simply to fly to the aid of their commander with the precious phials and powders, and see if these remedies, so carefully prepared, could cure or allay his deadly fever.

The canoe seemed fairly to fly through the water. Although Nika lay exhausted at the bottom, his weight appeared to impede them not a whit. They had but five leagues to accomplish. That was a mere trifle. They plied their paddles with a right good will, and the shores looked to be flying past them.

Presently Nika lifted his head and gazed eagerly about him. He had partaken of food and drink, and his elastic frame had recovered its normal activity. He gave a glad cry, and pointed to a distant object a long way in advance.

"It is the glow of the camp-fire," said Swanalulu, who had keener sight than even the far-sighted Gaspard. "The Lord be praised! We are almost there!"

The rowers redoubled their efforts; the spray flashed from the prow of the canoe; the brave little craft seemed to fly through the water. The glow of the camp fire was plainly visible to all eyes now. In a few minutes more the course of the canoe was altered slightly. It was headed towards shore, and Claude—the only one of the party not at that moment engaged in paddling, put his hands to his mouth and uttered a long, peculiar cry, which was a signal often employed by the Dautray brothers as a hail to one another.

Next moment a dark figure emerged from one of the huts, and ran down towards the river's bank.

"It is Jules!" cried Claude, waving his arms wildly. "Brother, brother! we are here! We have come!"

"Thank God!" was the answer spoken in Jules's deep

voice; "he is yet breathing—he is yet alive. But without some aid beyond what we can give him, he can scarce live till morning. Have ye any of the remedies with you?"

"Plenty, plenty! Father Fritz saw to that. O brother, our gallant commander! our great La Salle! Oh, it cannot be that he is cut off in the midst of his days. Surely the Lord will spare him! Oh, I pray that he may live!"

Gaspard had the medicine chest, and it was he who had profited most by the instructions given him on various occasions by Father Fritz, when he had visited the sick, in company with the two lads, upon their first landing in these regions.

Gaspard had a retentive memory, and moreover during these last few days he had received considerable instruction in the treatment of the river-side fever both from Father Fritz himself and from his betrothed, who feared lest he himself might fall a victim to it upon the journey. So he felt able to administer such remedies as should be needful, when he should have noted the condition of the sick man.

Three or four small huts had been hastily built upon a piece of rising ground, well away from the sedges of the river. In the largest of these a bed of fragrant leaves and dried mosses had been prepared for La Salle, and here he lay, rigid and death-like. A small lamp burned in the room, and threw its gleam upon the sunken and ghastly face of the great explorer. Already

it seemed as though the wings of the death-angel were overshadowing it. It was ashy grey in colour, and the features were set and rigid.

Gaspard stepped forward with a low exclamation of dismay, and knelt down beside the prostrate figure, feeling the pulse and laying his hand upon the heart to see if it still beat. Father Zenobe was muttering rapid prayers in a corner, his eyes red with weeping, whilst Jules's white, rigid face bespoke the misery that he was suffering.

"Can you do aught for him?" he asked, in a voice of strained misery.

Gaspard was busy opening a phial of pungent and aromatic scent.

"Rub this upon his temples, and seek to get him to inhale it," he replied, thrusting the phial into Jules's hands. "Claude, do thou chafe his feet, and if hot water can be obtained, fill some vessel, and set it close to them to retain the warmth. Give me brandy, too, in a spoon. I will mix some of this powder with it. If he can swallow it, it may bring back the action of the heart, which has wellnigh ceased. I have seen Father Fritz restore men even from a state as terrible as this. If only I had his skill! but we will do what we can."

Silently, or with a whispered word now and again to one another, the brothers worked, their father standing over them and lending a hand whenever there was aught that he could do, the Indians stepping backwards and forwards like shadows in the gloom, and bringing

what was asked for by those busied around the sick man.

Nimrod suddenly appeared, bearing with him a kid newly slain, and in the savage fashion of his tribe, he thrust the cold feet of the almost dying man into the hot carcase of the still palpitating beast, which he had cut open for the purpose. It was a savage method of restoring animal heat; yet Gaspard gave a nod of satisfaction, for he had seen good results from such methods before now.

Claude vigorously chafed the hands of the patient. Gaspard put a few drops of medicated stimulant down his throat every five minutes, and became more and more sure that it was swallowed. Jules rubbed the temples and nostrils with the pungent fluid, and gradually all thought that the death-like hue of the face began to change to something more natural and life-like. The voice of the friar repeating his offices of prayer formed a running accompaniment to their toil. It was a strange, long hour thus passed beside the almost dying man, for the thread of life was such a slender one that it seemed as though a breath might sunder it. But when, after long waiting for the summons which did not come, Father Zenobe arose from his knees and approached the patient, wondering if duty did not demand of him the last commendatory office, he uttered a slight exclamation of astonishment, and said,—

“He has changed! the Lord be praised! He will

not die, but live! That is not the face of a dying man!"

Neither was it. The imminent peril had passed. The powerful restoratives were acting; the fever was abating through the use of the cooling and healing herbs. The condition of the patient was critical in the extreme. He must be watched and tended hour by hour—almost minute by minute; but there was now room for hope.

Upon hearing the father's words, the self-contained Jules uttered a little sob, and threw his arms across his brother's neck.

"Gaspard, thou hast saved him! Thou hast saved him! Our noble-hearted, brave commander! How can France and the world rejoice enough that he is spared!"

"Say rather that God has saved him," answered Gaspard, gravely; "and for the rest, it was thy foresight in sending Nika so swiftly forth to hurry us that was the human instrument of his recovery. We would not have been here for many an hour had it not been for that urgent message of haste; and truly I think that before another hour had passed that noble heart would have ceased to beat."

"Indeed I think so," answered Jules; "for we had tried everything, and he was dying fast. But now, methinks, he will live, and his iron will will sustain him. It held him up long after other men would have succumbed, and therein lay the chiefest of the mischief;

for he went down almost like a man struck by death when once he was forced to give up the struggle. Now, however, his will may stand him in good stead, and we shall take care he does not use his strength too much until it be fully recovered."

And, indeed, it was long ere La Salle could think of taking any command himself again. For a whole month he lay passive and hardly conscious of his surroundings, taking what was given him like a child, but asking no question, and hardly knowing where he was, nor what was happening about him.

By very slow and easy stages during this time of prostration, the stricken commander was taken upwards by water to Fort Prud'homme. It was of the first importance to get him to some place where he could be better tended than was possible in the little encampments along the river-side. The devoted Indians quickly constructed a canoe wherein he could lie at ease upon a bed, wrapped around with buffalo skins, and thus accomplish what remained of that journey without greater risk than would be encountered did he remain in the heavy vapours close beside the river.

Great anxiety had been felt by Tonty as to the condition of La Salle, and he had stopped the party at Fort Prud'homme, waiting for tidings.

Before the commander arrived, however, the bulk of the Frenchmen had gone on, under command of Boisrondet, together with the whole of the Indian contingent; and only Tonty and a dozen of faithful and

attached servants remained to prepare for the stricken man, and seek to know his will.

It was long before La Salle could even attempt the task of consecutive thought; longer still before he could contemplate resuming the journey. And when the fever finally left him, as it did, thanks to the herb simples of Father Fritz, he lay in so prostrate a condition for above forty days, that grave fears were still entertained as to his ultimate recovery.

Meantime a disquieting rumour was brought down to this fort through a letter from Boisrondet, who had returned with the party to Fort Miami, according to orders.

In this letter he told Tonty that a rumour was rife in the north that Count Frontenac was to be recalled, or had resigned his office of governor of Canada, and that a new governor was to be sent from France in his place.

If this indeed were true, it might bode much evil for La Salle and his plans. Count Frontenac had stood his firm friend throughout, and had helped him when all besides had failed or turned back upon their plighted word.

It was long before he durst breathe a hint of this rumour to La Salle himself, and then only spoke of it as an idle tale, in which he trusted there was no foundation.

La Salle hoped the same, but could not but be anxious; and he sent Tonty forward to Michili

Mackinac once more, there to learn the whole truth, and await his coming. For he must learn what was about to befall in Canada, ere he could commence the undertakings upon which his heart was set.

Most trying and tedious were the long days which now followed. The ardent spirit of the commander was chafed almost beyond bearing by the fetters of the flesh. It seemed almost as though the struggle between the two would wear out the life and sap the feeble strength of the convalescent. Day by day passed by without any visible advance, and there were moments when black despondency would settle upon the tameless spirit of La Salle, and when he was tempted to turn his face to the wall and pray for death to relieve him of his burdens.

It was in such an hour as this, when Claude and Jules were sitting beside him, and Gaspard had gone forth to seek some fresh herb, which he hoped might do good, that the sunlight of the doorway was suddenly darkened by a figure standing there, and a familiar voice spoke these words,—

“Peace be with you!”

Claude sprang to his feet with an inarticulate cry, and next moment was sobbing in the arms of Father Fritz.

Jules rose hastily with a light of welcome in his sunken eyes, and even La Salle, turning his head wearily to see the cause of the disturbance, suddenly raised himself with more of energy than he had evinced since the commencement of his illness.

Father Fritz gently put the boys out from the door, and shut himself in with the sick man alone. They, certain that the patient would now be well cared for, dashed off in search of Gaspard, and told the joyful news.

“Ah, now he will live! now he will do well!” cried the latter, joyfully. “But what has brought him? How did he come?”

“Nay, I know not. I have asked no question. There has been no time. I only know that he is here; and that our noble commander will now do well.”

Eagerly the brothers retraced their steps to the camp. There they found their father, who told them that word as to La Salle's condition had been passed down the river, at Swanalulu's suggestion, in the hope that it might reach Father Fritz's ears, and bring him if possible to their aid. This it seemed had been the case. He had been upon the northern limit of his missionary wanderings when the tale had reached him; and guessing at the probable tedium of such a recovery, he had pushed on to Fort Prud'homme in the hope of being of service to his friend.

And indeed he was. From that day forward La Salle commenced to gain ground. The fits of black depression yielded to the gentle and holy influence of Father Fritz. Resignation took the place of dull despair, and calm hopefulness replaced restless fretting. The spiritual change and advance was instantly marked by a corresponding improvement in the patient's physical condition; and every day saw him a little stronger.

Father Fritz was able to write for him several important letters, and to arrange, through his good understanding with the Indians, for their safe conveyance to their destination.

All this eased the mind of La Salle, and tended to his recovery ; and Father Fritz encouraged him to hope for the best, even were this rumour true of a change of governors, and at least to learn submission and patience if the things of this life did go something contrary.

“ We are but children at school here,” he would say ; “ and the smoothest path is not always the best. It is the rough tracks and the steep ascents that lead us upward to the heights above. Who would not tread the stonier road, and meet the chill winds and blinding storm, if at the last he find himself raised above the world, and nearer to the heavenly things than the traveller who has sought always the pleasant, easy path, and when night comes, finds himself still in the valley, no nearer to the heights of glory than when he started forth ? ”

And La Salle would slightly shake his head, remarking that he minded not trouble so that he might achieve success, nor did he, perhaps, fully understand the import of Father Fritz’s words when he replied,—

“ Success, success—may the Lord give to all of us such success as He has in store for each ; but let us take it—let us ask it—at His hands alone, and not seek it from our fellow-men.”

But if La Salle did not fully enter into these

thoughts, he was yet greatly cheered by this visit from Father Fritz. His real recovery dated from that arrival, and the visitor remained with his old friend until the latter was, at the beginning of August, able to resume his journey northward, with the purpose of rejoining Tonty at Michili Mackinac, and there taking counsel with him as to the next step in the proposed campaign.

Father Fritz turned southward, back to his own more immediate flock, though, had he not had so many to visit, he would gladly have renewed his acquaintance with the Indians on the Illinois, many of whom remembered him with warm affection yet.

When the travellers reached the great Illinois town, they found that the Indians were beginning to return to it, and to rebuild it. They rushed eagerly down to the river to welcome La Salle, and to beg of him to make his home amongst them, as he had once promised, and to save them from the raids of the Iroquois, which threatened to exterminate them.

La Salle saw in this appeal a favourable opportunity. He was not able himself to remain with them; but he conceived the plan of leaving behind him some of his followers, as a pledge of his return, and setting them to commence the fortifications of the great rock overhanging the river a little above the Illinois town, upon which his eyes had been cast from the very first, as a probable and likely spot for the first of his chain of fortresses.

Taking counsel with his little band, he found that Dautray was willing to act as his lieutenant in this.

All his sons, even Jules at La Salle's expressed wish, would remain with him, and six more trusty white men, together with Swanalulu, Tessouat, and a few more Indians of tested fidelity.

La Salle would return as quickly as might be—he hoped before the end of the year—and, meantime, they would survey the rock, gather together materials, instruct the Indians how to assist them, and even, perhaps, commence the construction of a fort. The Illinois would see by this that their allies were in earnest, and would give ready help in any undertaking that would be instrumental in repelling the attacks of the Iroquois. A fortress almost in their midst would be a guarantee of firm alliance, and when the plan was made known to the Illinois, they yelped and danced for joy, and placed themselves and their services unreservedly in the hands of La Salle.

So the commander went forth, cheered and comforted, to see what was passing in the world of Canada, and Dautray with his little band took up their abode amongst the Indians, in the commodious quarters allotted to them, and commenced the survey of the great rock, and the preparations for the construction of another fort.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LA SALLE'S COLONY.

“**H**E is coming! He is coming! The Indians have seen him! He and Captain Tonty are both on their way! They will be here ere the sun has set!”

Jules flung down the tools with which he was hard at work, and faced his excited brother with a flushed face.

“Who comes? What sayest thou, Claude? Who is approaching?”

“The commander, La Salle himself, and Captain Tonty with him!” panted the excited Claude. “We met a number of Indians who had been to Fort Miami. The party had been there three days ago, and had found La Salle there, setting matters to rights before joining us here. They must be on their way now. They must be nigh at hand. Shall we go to meet them, or shall we give them welcome here?”

All the party had by this time gathered round the excited messenger, and behind that eager ring of white men stood a larger circle of dusky Indians, gazing with their stolid, immovable faces at the gesticulations of the

excited Frenchmen, and picking up here and there a word of the rapid talk that passed between them.

The name of La Salle was caught and passed in a whisper from mouth to mouth, and the eyes of the Indians brightened at the sound. La Salle was regarded by them as a bulwark of protection from the hated and dreaded Iroquois. If he were with them, they felt no fear of their envious foes.

Dautray, the father, looked reflective, and began calculating in his own mind.

“Returning already—so soon as December—and he left us not before September was well advanced. Then it is plain that he has not gone in person to Canada to see the new governor, as he purposed to do, if it were possible to take the journey. It may be that his bodily weakness has hindered him. I trust he may bring good news of the friendly disposition of the new ruler.”

For it was now known, even in these far-distant regions, that the friendly Count Frontenac had been removed from office, and had returned to France, whilst Le Febre de la Barre, a man of naval celebrity, reigned in his stead; and as yet no whisper as to his disposition towards La Salle and his giant undertaking had penetrated to these wilds.

Doubtless the commander himself would have some news to bring them, and the excitement of the moment was keen.

The scene was a strange one.

Mention has been made already of that gigantic rock

jutting out into the waters of the Illinois, impregnable on all sides save one, and only approached even from behind by a tortuous, steep, and difficult path. The flat top of this rock (sometimes called the "Starved Rock," owing to the fact that a party of fugitive Indians were starved out there) was about one acre in extent, and a small spring welled up, as it were, from the very heart of the stone, and fell trickling down to the base, where it quickly lost itself in the river beneath.

The natural advantages of such a spot for a fortress had struck La Salle the first moment he beheld it, and with the tenacity of purpose so characteristic of him, he had never for a moment lost sight of his original intention of planting around that great rock the first of his chain of colonies.

It was in order to their acting as his pioneers in this matter that he had left behind him, three months ago, the Dautrays and some comrades of their own race; and well had they justified their fidelity to the cause by what they had accomplished in his absence.

When La Salle left them, the rock had been crowned with a tangled mass of trees. Now these were all cut down, and with the timber thus procured a stout palisade had been set up all round the edge of the rock, a protection from the shots of hostile Indians, and from the accidents which would otherwise certainly happen to dwellers thereon, for all sides save one were absolutely precipitous, and a slip on the edge would mean almost certain death.

The flat surface which formed the crown of the rock was now cleared ready for the construction of a fort. A few temporary huts had been erected for the workers, who preferred to remain there at nights, well out of reach of the vapours which clung about the lower banks of the river, instead of returning to their quarters in the Indian settlement. There the Dautrays and their countrymen, and a few of the attached Indians, had lived almost ever since the departure of La Salle, and here they had worked might and main every day and all day long, seeking to accomplish as much as so small a party could hope to do before the return of the commander.

The Indians had been eager friends and allies. They had furnished their guests with abundance of food, so that hunting had been unnecessary to them, save as an occasional interlude from hard work. Messengers from many tribes had come to ask what was being done, and to bring promises of alliance and support; and already there began to appear in several quarters little isolated camps of Indians from other parts, gathering, as it were, beneath the shelter of the white men's sovereignty and protection, and forming fresh bonds of alliance one with the other.

Gaspard had something of the same tact with the Indians that La Salle possessed in such large measure, and he had a comprehensive knowledge of their language, which enabled him to make himself understood in almost every dialect.

He did his utmost to prove to the artless denizens of the woods the nature of the great offensive and defensive alliance that La Salle had projected, and to induce them to enter into it with zeal and real comprehension.

It appeared that they did understand, and did desire it; for they were growing increasingly afraid of the raids of the Iroquois, and were more and more certain that in the white men lay their only hope of ridding themselves of that peril.

It was not wonderful, therefore, that they set themselves joyfully to the task of preparing material for the building of this new fortress, behind which they might shelter themselves; and from day to day the woods resounded with the strokes of innumerable axes; and the spoils of the forest, after being roughly hewn into shape, were laboriously dragged up the difficult and sometimes dangerous path, till quite a store of beams and timbers lay piled together awaiting the commencement of the fort itself.

Hitherto that had not been attempted—the erection of the palisade and the preparation of the stores being sufficient for the strength of the workers. Jules had set up the forge once more, and was manufacturing nails and bolts by the dozen out of the rough material he could collect to his hand. Moreover, they were laying in stores to last them through the winter, in case the Indians departed to their hunting-grounds as the season advanced. But although many went off to range the

woods, a great number remained in the town, to rebuild it, and to keep near to their friends.

The return of La Salle was eagerly watched for by Indians and Frenchmen alike, and the news that he was not far away was hailed with delight by all.

The Indians rushed to their friends to give notice, and to prepare a great feast. The Frenchmen put the finishing touch to their palisade, and hoisted upon the little flag-turret the banner of France. The one small fieldpiece which they possessed was loaded, ready to fire a salute, and scouts were sent into the forest to watch the paths, and give notice of La Salle's coming.

It wanted yet an hour to sundown before the shrill signals echoing through the woods gave warning that the party was approaching.

Then Dautray put his men in order upon the rock. He sent Swanalulu down the path, to lead the party up by the best ascent, he remaining just within the gateway of the palisade, which was flung wide open, his brave comrades in ranks around him, every face alight with joy and anticipation.

Gaspard stood at the gun, ready to fire the salute when the signal should be given. All hearts were beating high with the excitement of happiness.

"They come! They come!" was shouted from below, and sure enough, from out the gloomy forest track, the little band of adventurers could be seen defiling in orderly fashion—the advance guard of the larger party to follow.

Was La Salle amongst these? Of course he was! When was he ever known to be other than in the van and forefront? He could be singled out by his stately height, and by the commanding dignity of his gait; and beside him strode his faithful lieutenant, Tonty, the one-handed hero, as full of enthusiasm and firmness as his chief.

Next moment the gun boomed forth overhead, and the forest rang to the shouts and whoopings of Frenchmen and Indians. La Salle, raising his eyes to the lonely rock, beheld its rocky crown bristling with the palisade work that had been made, and he saw the puff of smoke from the gun, even before the booming rattle fell upon his ears.

With rapid and eager steps he followed the guide up the path, now well defined owing to the transport of heavy timbers, and stood as if in a trance, gazing at the glowing faces of the faithful little band, and at the task they had accomplished in his absence.

“My good friends! my noble friends! I never thought to see the like of this!” he cried, taking first one and then another by the hand, and warmly clasping each.

And indeed he had anticipated nothing more than the possible clearing of the rock of encumbering timber. He had been so well used to perfunctory service, which ceased so soon as his eye was withdrawn, that he had scarce realized what could be accomplished by a small and resolute band, all working with a will.

Tonty was equally delighted and surprised, shook his friends by the hand, embraced the lads he had grown to love, and went from point to point examining the character of the work, and bestowing commendation freely and fully.

The Indians were then visited in their encampment at the base of the rock, and many presents were given to them from the stores collected and brought by the commander for his infant colony. All were joined in amity and goodwill, joy and gladness. It was long after dark before the commander was able to retire to the hut prepared specially for himself, Tonty, and Boisrondet on the rock, and to enjoy a civilized meal, and converse with his friends.

There was much to hear, and much to tell.

La Salle had been unable to attempt the winter journey to Canada, as all agreed that it would be simply suicide in the state of prostration which had succeeded to the long fever. He had wintered, therefore, at Michili Mackinac, and had sent messengers and letters into Canada, soliciting aid, and unfolding more and more his treasured plan.

His friends the Pottawatamies had supplied him with a goodly store of furs in return for hatchets, cloth, and other things of home manufacture, and he had sent these stores into Canada by his messengers, instructing them to barter them to the best advantage, and to bring back with them those things most needful to the infant colony.

So far, however, none of these men had returned. But the winter travelling was too slow and uncertain for this fact to cause any present uneasiness. Doubtless they might even wait for the return of the spring before attempting to bring their supplies down the lake, and up to the rock.

And the temper of the new governor? That question was eagerly put by those who sat by the fire and heard La Salle's tale.

The commander spoke cheerfully on this point.

He had not heard anything definite on this point. But the Comte de la Barre was a brave man, and he had written to him a full account of his recent achievement, and of what it might lead to. No true son of France, he maintained, could fail to be won over by the glorious scheme of wealth and glory thus held out; and although La Salle had many bitter private enemies, he confidently hoped that his own explanations to the governor would do away with the false impressions and libellous stories circulated by these, and would ensure his continued friendship.

Tonty was perhaps, for once, a little less sanguine. He said nothing, but Gaspard detected a shade of anxiety upon his face; and on another day, when they were working together out of hearing of the rest, he asked him what he thought of the chances of support from La Barre.

Tonty slightly shook his head.

"The Sieur de la Salle may be right, more right than

I; but I have great doubts. Count Frontenac was a man of much wider and more generous spirit than most. He looked beyond the petty small results of the enterprise to its ultimate great end. But other governors of Canada will be less wide-minded, I fear. It does not take any great amount of penetration to see that if the stores of furs collected along these upper rivers are diverted from the Canadian market, and sent down the Mississippi, and so to France by another route, Canada will lose at once one of her main sources of wealth. To be sure, she will still command the fur-trade of the north, and as all men are beginning to say and to urge, if men do not commence in earnest to cultivate the land, and to start industries such as there are at home, if they go on idling away their time, always trusting to the fur-trade to enrich them—the ruin of the colony is inevitable. We all see that and say that, and Count Frontenac would have looked with complacency on the diverting of some of this doubtful trading, which is by no means the source of wealth that many suppose, and is, indeed, one of the curses of the colony. But others cannot see it, and La Salle has more bitter and powerful enemies than he quite knows. A man of such spirit as he, is somewhat apt to despise and ignore opposition, till at last it rises up, and is in danger of crushing him.”

And upon another occasion Tonty opened the eyes of Gaspard and his brothers to another source of peril which threatened La Salle's colony.

The jealousy of the French Canadians was not the

only element of danger. There were Dutch and English settlers in Albany, who were equally set against this scheme, as likely to be the ruin of their fur-trade, if once it fairly succeeded.

There had always been bitter jealousy between the settlers in Canada and those of Albany, and stores of furs going to either place had been, whenever possible, intercepted and carried off in triumph.

Now enemies will sometimes band together in a common cause, and Tonty had heard a whisper to the effect that the new governor would not object to seeing war carried into La Salle's quarters by those who had hitherto been his own foes.

Of course the white settlers themselves would make no raids upon the new colony. That was not the way they worked. Their part would be to stir up the Iroquois—at no time a difficult task—to the fury of warfare against the Illinois and the western tribes; and if once the power of these tribes could be broken, and their alliance dissolved, there would be small chance of success for La Salle and his project.

Also, if constant wars were breaking out amongst the Indians on this account, it could easily be represented to the King of France that La Salle was a disturber of the public peace, and a dangerous man. It would be easy to declare that he was infringing his patent, and making himself a king in the western wilds, to the great detriment of the king's pet Canadian colony. Then it was probable that La Salle might be recalled

in disgrace, and if once his hand were withdrawn from the helm there seemed little hope of steering the ship to the desired haven.

These things were not spoken all at once, but in a whisper now and again, as news crept in from Indians wandering hither and thither, and occasional letters were brought from the various places whither La Salle's messengers had been sent.

But the disquieting thing was that none of the messengers themselves returned, and no one arrived with the supplies of French goods, so needful to those who had dealings with the Indian tribes.

The Indians were friendly and well disposed. They came more and more with the advance of spring, and built themselves small villages round the great rock, which was now known as Fort Louis, in honour of the King of France, who had done very little as yet to deserve La Salle's gratitude.

There were disquieting rumours brought in from time to time respecting the Iroquois and their intended invasion; but, hitherto, nothing had been seen of them, and it was hoped that the presence of the French colony would suffice to keep them away.

But La Salle knew well that he could not hope to keep the Indians faithful, and continue to receive their contributions of fur and provision, if he had nothing to give in return, and his stores brought from Michili Mackinac were rapidly dwindling away.

Why did his messengers not return? Where were

they? Why did not the open spring weather bring them back? Was it possible that they had been caught and detained by the governor or his myrmidons as lawless *coureurs de bois*? La Salle knew well that the law refused to recognize such persons as lawful traders, and seized upon them and their goods whenever it was possible. But surely they would not take his men and treat them so—he who held the king's patent and commission for what he was doing, and could not hope to succeed if his messengers were treated in this fashion?

But there was no knowing, and his face began soon to lose its first look of triumphant gladness, and to grow pinched and haggard. His time was spent gazing towards the forest from whence his messengers ought to emerge, and he oftentimes scoured the woods himself on the pretext of hunting, but really with the hope of learning something about the tardy servants upon whose arrival with stores so much depended.

At last the suspense became intolerable. He had written and dispatched letter after letter to the governor, but no answer had been returned to him. The last he had sent by Swanalulu; and he knew that that trusty fellow would himself return, even though he could bring no letter or good tidings back.

He longed himself to start for Canada, but he was afraid to leave his colony.

“If in my absence the Iroquois attack,” he had said in one of his letters, explaining the situation, “the

distrustful Illinois will at once believe that I have hounded them on to do so—perhaps even that I am leading them in person.”

Yes, that innate distrust so deeply implanted in the Indian races, and especially marked in the tribes of the Illinois, was one of the greatest drawbacks to the success of La Salle's scheme. So long as they saw him in their midst, they regarded him almost as a god, and believed themselves safe under the shelter of his fort. But if his personal presence were to be removed, as Tonty had discovered on a former occasion, there was no knowing what wild rumours might not again arise. And although all began to see that it might be impossible for La Salle to avoid the journey to Canada, and even a possible voyage back to France to appeal to the king himself, yet all desired to postpone that day as long as possible, and meantime to promote the growth and well-being of the colony in every possible way.

July had come before Swanalulu returned. And the colony had grown and flourished in a marvellous way. The Illinois had returned by thousands to their town, which was now larger than ever. There was a great colony of Shawanoes on the opposite side of the river, another of Abenakis from Maine, and the friendly Miamis from the upper Kankakee, as well as many others with whose outlandish names the reader will scarce care to be troubled. La Salle had gained one of his main points. The various tribes were willing to

sink their minor differences and to live at peace with each other beneath the nominal sway of the French, and under their protection, should the dreaded Iroquois swoop down upon them. If only the supplies from Canada would come, and the support of the governor be given him, all would be well; but with the arrival of the faithful Swanalulu all hopes of this vanished.

The trusty Indian had delivered his letter, but had waited in vain for an answer. He was always put off with dubious messages, and at last plainly told that the governor would employ a messenger of his own, had he any communication to send to the *Sieur de la Salle*.

Meantime Swanalulu had not been idle. He had been picking up information everywhere, and all served to convince him more and more of the bad feeling existing in Quebec and Montreal towards the project in the West. The messengers sent by *La Salle* had not been seized as he had feared; but they had been seduced from their allegiance, and had turned robbers and cheats. They had sold the furs at absurdly low prices to Canadian traders, and had for the most part returned to France with the proceeds, which they chose to regard in the light of their arrears of pay.

Every one there spoke of *La Salle* as a hare-brained madman, and a source of danger to the colony. He would involve it in an endless Indian war, and as for his scheme, it was openly ridiculed by high and low; and Swanalulu heard that the new governor had written to the king, begging him to withdraw his

favour and commission, and to recall La Salle from his petty kingdom, where he had set himself up as an independent ruler.

The heart of La Salle burned within him as he listened to the string of calumnies, of which these were a part, invented by his enemies for his overthrow.

His resolute mind, however, was not long in reaching a conclusion, and his iron will seemed to strengthen itself anew to meet the buffets of adverse fortune.

“There is but one thing left for me to do,” he said. “I must to His Majesty of France in person. My enemies and detractors would make me out a madman and a usurper. But let me stand face to face with the mighty Louis, and tell him mine own story, and I doubt not he will not only renew my commission, but enlarge my powers, so that I may openly triumph over my foes. I have stood in the presence of that majesty before, and have won my way when I had but my poor surmises to offer him. Mine enemies have hinted that it is but a fable, this voyage of mine, to the great river’s mouth. Let them all tell me so before the king’s face, and see to whom he will give the credence.”

Tonty sat still and thoughtful. All faces were very grave.

“It is a serious undertaking, and will take thee far away from us. But yet methinks that thou must needs go, if aught is to be accomplished.”

“So think I; and thou wilt command here in my stead, good Tonty; and, methinks, if the Indians know whither

I be gone, even to the realm of the great king beyond the seas, they will no longer distrust and fear that I have stirred up their enemies against them. I would, indeed, that I had a vessel of mine own, and could glide down the great river and sail across without facing the wiles of my foes in Canada. But, perchance, if fortune favours me, I may return that way. And thou wilt hold St. Louis for me, and I shall know that there be two faithful knots of men in these parts awaiting my return—one here, and one in the Home of Peace, which God grant I may live to visit once more !”

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOES WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

HE was going to take only Jules with him all the way—the faithful, silent, trusty Jules, who would have followed him to the world's end, and laid down his life for him a hundred times had it been needful.

The two Indian hunters, Nimrod the Mohegan, and Nika the Shawanoe, were permitted, at their own earnest entreaty, to be of his party, for La Salle realized that the arrival at the French Court of two handsome, semi-civilized and Christianized Indians would create both curiosity and approval, and give an air of fidelity and truthfulness to the story he had to tell in the ears of His Majesty of France.

But the rest of the Frenchmen and trusty Indians must remain behind with Tonty in the fort. Tonty must strive his utmost to keep together the colony in the absence of La Salle; and all knew that, if indeed (as seemed most probable) he found it needful to sail for France, his absence might be a very long one—perhaps extending over a period of two years or more.

It was tedious work crossing the ocean in those days, and more tedious still was it to obtain from the tardy king those needful patents and commissions, without which the whole scheme must prove abortive.

Brave and resolute as Tonty was, and well as the Indians received him, as La Salle's lieutenant and substitute, when the whole situation was explained to them in solemn council, yet the hearts of many present were heavy within them. They knew the perils and uncertainties of this life in the wilderness, and the many foes that beset them on all sides. If the governor of Canada proved inimical—and there was every reason now to fear this—and if the English and Dutch settlers sought to stir up the Iroquois against the western tribes, whilst the governor of Canada did not do all in his power to check the warlike movement, things might indeed go hard with the little colony, and it might be wellnigh exterminated before La Salle had a chance of returning to it, armed with the fuller powers and the larger supplies which he sanguinely hoped to obtain through a personal appeal to the king.

The more they discussed the situation, the more self-evident did it appear that, if these powers and stores were given to him, he must not adventure himself with them through the inimical territory of Canada. He must make straight for the Gulf of Mexico, and bring his reinforcements up the great river; and it might be well, as time went on, if Tonty could spare any

of his men, to send them down the river to Father Fritz's little community, there to await the news of the coming of the vessels, which news could then be transmitted to Tonty by some swift and trusty Indian scouts.

This, however, was looking a long way forward. For the present the rocky fortress must be the home of the gallant little band, environed by the hordes of the wilderness, who at present were all well disposed and friendly. How long this friendly confidence would last, if perils and raids came to disturb the tranquillity of the moment, or if supplies of French goods for barter entirely failed, was a question none could immediately answer. La Salle, however, was hopeful and cheerful, and Tonty brave and resolute. It was agreed between them that he should take a small company with him as far as Michili Mackinac, and seek to obtain there a certain amount of the goods so greatly needed, which these returning ones might bring back. After that they must wait in patience for the result of the mission of La Salle to France.

Jean Dautray and his sons were chosen for this work, and very gladly did they set forth in company with the commander for the first stages of his long journey.

It was known by this time that Father Hennepin was now safe in Canada, after having passed through many hairbreadth perils amongst the Indians during the past months. La Salle had some idea of persuading him to accompany him to the French court, to corroborate his tale. If he could not obtain his company (and Father

Hennepin was of rather a jealous disposition, and not always too friendly towards La Salle), there was Father Zenobe Membré, also in Canada, who could be perhaps better depended upon. This father was known to be meditating a return to France to report himself to his superior, and rest awhile after his long labours amongst the Indians. With an ecclesiastic beside him, La Salle might effect a better impression than if he went alone. He turned over many plans as they marched along, and discussed the situation with his faithful followers in unwonted freedom. He had come to trust the Dautrays to a degree he seldom vouchsafed to any. It was his misfortune and curse that he had so often been betrayed, for it had warped his nature, and given him a saturnine and cynical sense of suspicion towards almost all of those about him. This made him unpopular with the bulk of his followers, although they revered and feared him. His failure to inspire affection and confidence in his own countrymen was as remarkable as his success with the Indians. But when once he did give his trust and affection, he had the power of inspiring a very deep and intense devotion.

At Michili Mackinac a most unwelcome surprise awaited the travellers.

They had heard from Indian scouts that a party of Frenchmen had just arrived from Canada, and upon reaching the fort they found all excitement and confusion there.

The cause of this excitement was easily explained.

A party of French Canadians, headed by an officer of the king's dragoons, the Chevalier de Baugis, had arrived there *en route* for Fort St. Louis; and when La Salle was ushered into his presence, he received him with a species of lofty condescension, explaining haughtily that he had come to take possession of the fort in the king's name, and to order him (La Salle) to repair immediately to Quebec, to answer to the governor there concerning certain rumours and stories which had come to the ears of the authorities.

La Salle's face grew somewhat pale as he heard this injunction; but he knew too well the critical condition of his affairs to make it worse by any outbreak of passion at this juncture.

He bowed ceremoniously to the chevalier; wished him well upon his errand; remarked that the command to repair to Quebec was a little superfluous, since he was already half-way there; and asked leave to pen a dispatch to his lieutenant, the Sieur de Tonty, preparing him for the arrival of the chevalier, and suggesting certain modifications of arrangements already proposed.

The hearts of the Dautrays were filled with indignation at this open and wanton insult to their commander. Had he not by his own energy and untiring zeal built Fort St. Louis, and gathered around it a colony of wild Indians, all proud through his influence and persuasion to call themselves the children of the King of France? And for his reward was he

to be superseded in his command by this supercilious chevalier, and sent, practically in disgrace, back into Canada, to answer the frivolous charges brought against him?

Had this thing happened at the fort itself—had this insult been offered to La Salle in the midst of his colony, in the stronghold of his loyal dependants—it is possible that the reception of the chevalier might have been vastly different from what it was now.

La Salle's haughty spirit could at any time ill brook contradiction and vexatious opposition, and his supremacy over the Indians had fostered in him, perhaps, a haughtiness of spirit which had always lain latent within him. But just at this juncture, when everything depended upon the favour of the King of France, he realized that he must do nothing which could give his enemies the chance of representing him as a rebel against that monarch's authority.

The chevalier came as the king's representative, and La Salle had no choice but to receive him as such. When he retired to another room to discuss the situation with his faithful friends, he made this plain to them, whilst not attempting to disguise from them his indignation and hurt pride at the treatment his long services had met with from those in authority.

But he still hoped to put things right by his personal presence; if not in Canada, at least in France. He therefore wrote a guarded letter to Tonty, asking him to receive the chevalier with all due courtesy and

honour, yielding to him the command of the fort, since he came to take that position, but begging Tonty to remain on as his representative and friend; for no one knew better than La Salle how much the success of his scheme depended upon the presence on the rock of some one in authority trusted by the Indians.

This letter was to be entrusted to Gaspard and Claude to deliver to Tonty as quickly as possible, whilst their father was instructed to remain behind, and act as guide to the party of the chevalier.

It was probable that the latter had with him a fair supply of those things of which the little colony stood most in need, and La Salle purposed to represent strongly to him the necessity of being so provided, if he wished to do any good there, or to hold his own with the Indians.

That night was a sorrowful one for the three brothers, who shared a rough log-cabin together, and sat far into the night over their fire, discussing past, present, and future with hopeful, yet rather heavy hearts.

They were about to part for an indefinite period—Jules to accompany La Salle upon a long and perilous journey, from which it was possible he might never return; the other pair to face, for the same indefinite period, the dangers and hardships of a life in the wilderness, with the additional peril of a new and untried commander, who was a stranger to them, who was plainly no friend to La Salle, and who might very easily convert their Indian allies into bitter

enemies, especially if he were foolhardy enough to show his hostility towards the ex-commander, and so perplex the minds of the savages by an appearance of divided rule.

“In sooth, I would the chevalier were at the bottom of the sea!” cried Claude, drawing a deep sigh. “It is shameful that our great commander should be treated in so evil a manner! All France would cry shame upon it if the thing were known! He has adventured life and fortune—everything—upon this enterprise; and now, when the first step is taken, the first gleam of success has come, he is recalled, forsooth, like a disgraced servant, and another is put in his place, who knows no more of the life nor of the Indians than a babe! Heaven send the whole enterprise be not ruined by him!”

“We will seek the King of France himself, and tell our tale to him—in his very ears,” said Jules, with a sombre gleam in his dark eyes. “The commander says that in former days he was gracious and favourable. It is scarcely likely he will be less so now, when so much has already been accomplished.”

“Yet I fear it will be a weary while ere you can return,” remarked Gaspard, in thoughtful tones. “I wonder how it will fare with the colony all that while. True, the Indians are not an impatient people. So long as they dwell at ease and are safe from their foes, they rest content with their life. But there is mischief afoot, I greatly fear. I talked with some of the chevalier’s

followers, and I disliked many of the things they said. It is plain that our commander has many bitter foes in Canada, and these will seek to ruin his plans whilst he is absent in France."

"What will they do?" asked Claude quickly.

"Set on the Iroquois to scatter and disperse the western tribes—our friends and allies," answered Gaspard.

"But surely it is bad for all Canada, and all persons there, when the Indians fall upon each other. It hinders the trade; it—"

"Oh, yes; it is bad for all," answered Gaspard, a little bitterly. "But when the rancour is as great as it now is, they will submit to a passing inconvenience, rather than permit the carrying out of a project which they think will permanently impoverish Canada. They are too blind to see that in the end it will tend to enrich the parent country, and so reflect glory and prosperity on all her dominions. They are permitting the English and Dutch in Albany to stir up the Iroquois to war—a thing they strove to hold in check and keep down until now. But they will make use of any unworthy tool to defeat the plans of our great commander. It will need all the energy and strength and tact that we possess to hold the colony together in his absence. Methinks the chevalier will do but little to promote its well-being."

With the first rays of daylight the brothers arose and prepared to depart. Their hearts were too full for many

words. Jules stood over them as they endeavoured to swallow the meal he had risen to prepare for them whilst they slept. They had grown used to farewells, and strove to keep up their courage now, but all knew that this parting was a more serious one than any which had gone before.

It was quite possible that they might never look upon each other's faces on this side of the grave; and when they stood together, holding each other by the hand, and afraid to trust their voices in speech, it was with a manifest effort that Claude suddenly said,—

“Let us not be cast down; let us trust in the Lord. Perchance the meeting may be nearer than we think. If His coming be at hand, and if we strive to work and to wait for it, perchance we shall meet in the air, with all His risen saints. O brothers, let us think of that, and pray for that; then we need not weep over this parting.”

The thought was a comforting and strengthening one, and it helped the brothers through their last words and tender embraces. La Salle strode in just as they rose from their knees, after joining their voices together in the Lord's Prayer; and he entrusted his letter for Tonty to Gaspard's care, together with many verbal messages which he had neither the time nor the inclination to put upon paper.

Many times did the youths turn back to look at the little knot of friends standing to watch them as they

tramped away towards the lake, down which the friendly Pottawatamies were ready to transport them. La Salle's tall figure seemed to tower up in majestic height and dignity. Jules stood beside him, and they noted that the commander had laid his hand upon the shoulder of his trusty servant.

A mist rose before Claude's eyes as the lads turned for the last time to wave their hands, ere a bend in the path shut them out from view.

"My heart misgives me," he suddenly exclaimed; "I feel as though I had looked for the last time upon that noble face."

"Nay, say not so," answered Gaspard quickly. "Heaven grant that there may be joyous and prosperous days yet before us, and that we may meet again ere many months have passed, to complete the noble edifice of which the corner-stone is already laid!"

The brothers met with no hindrances upon their return journey. They were by this time seasoned travellers, and the country was familiar to them. But as they came near to the fort, and saw that their approach had been observed, and that Tonty himself was hurrying forth to meet them with a kindly welcome shining in his eyes, their hearts sank at the thought of the tidings which they brought; and much did they wonder how it would be received by the deputy-commander, and whether he might not refuse to remain in the fort if he no longer held the command there.

Tonty very quickly saw that the messengers came with some bad news, and after reading La Salle's letter, he fully understood what this was. As they walked up the steep path to the fort, he questioned the brothers very closely and earnestly about the chevalier and his company, and about all the news they had gathered as to the state of affairs in Canada.

When they stood once more upon the rock, with the walls of the fort about them, Tonty suddenly threw back his head and commanded the garrison and some of the Indian chieftains to be summoned.

Whilst this was being done, he said to the brothers, in quick and earnest tones,—

“There is but one course for us to take. We must receive this new commander with honour and glory. The men must never suspect that La Salle has been flouted or disgraced. Leave all to me. Trust it in my hands; and whatever you hear me say, echo it, enlarge upon it: never let the meanness, the cowardice, the ingratitude of the authorities be known—else the labour of all these years of toil will be thrown away.”

The youths listened in silence and in some perplexity; but when Tonty spoke and addressed the crowd gathered about him, they began to understand better the nobility of the man's nature, and the policy to which he pledged himself with perfect self-abnegation.

He told the assembled people that the gracious and fatherly King of France, who looked with such tender

care upon his far-off subjects and Indian children, had shown his kind and gracious disposition by not leaving them fatherless and headless by the absence of the great and noble pioneer, the *Sieur de la Salle*. Although it was needful for him to visit His Majesty, yet they were not to be deprived of a protector. The king was sending to them a brave chevalier, well trained in arms, and of a noble house, and he would command the fort, and watch over them, even as *La Salle* had done, until that worthy leader could return to them.

Whatever the French may have thought of this explanation, it completely satisfied the Indians, who whooped and yelped with wonder and joy, as they realized the interest taken in them by the King of France; and they prepared to welcome the new commander with every show of honour, which was exactly what *Tonty* had desired, for any feeling of distrust amongst the Indians would be fatal to the life and growth of the little colony.

A week later the chevalier and his train appeared. *La Salle's* injunctions and hints had not been without effect, as the new-comers were amply provided with stores for the fort, and with articles of barter for the Indians.

These latter crowded with curiosity and admiration round the strangers, and saluted them with all manner of strange shouts and cries. *De Baugis* stalked along with a haughty gait, and recoiled with something very like disgust from the attentions of his new subjects.

However, he ordered that a distribution of presents should be promptly made, and that satisfied them for any apparent lack of courtesy on the part of the new commander.

De Baugis and his men filed up to the fort, where they were welcomed by a salute, and by the greetings of Tonty and his garrison.

Tonty nobly fulfilled La Salle's request. He had vacated the house in the centre of the fort which had been built for the commander, and had taken up his own quarters in another place, with the Dautrays and Boisrondet; the last being intensely indignant at the turn of affairs, though too loyal to Tonty to disobey his desires and express commands.

The chevalier made his headquarters in the vacated house, and soon began to show his disposition by changing and upsetting all La Salle's wisely-planned rules and laws, sneering at everything he saw about him, openly ridiculing the idea of these western colonies, and doing all in his power to dishearten and disgust the men, who had hitherto been stanch and faithful.

This was too much for Tonty's patience, and he remonstrated vehemently with the chevalier.

Already the fruit of the new *régime* was being displayed in the lawlessness and self-indulgence of the men. La Salle had always been able to keep a firm hand over them. The presence of the Indians around the fort had always been a source of danger. He had absolutely refused to permit his followers to intermingle

freely with them; but De Baugis cared for none of his rules, and the men at once took advantage of his foolishness, and lived in a manner obnoxious even to the Indians; they committed all sorts of eccentricities in behaviour, discipline was relaxed, Tonty's power was undermined, and, save for a faithful few, he had none he could trust if emergency or peril were to arrive.

“They have hit upon a cunning plan for undoing La Salle's work,” he would say bitterly to BoisronDET and the Dautrays, as they watched the dispersion of their men amongst the Indians, and saw how the life was telling upon them, and unfitting them for their daily duties.

“It makes one's blood boil in one's veins!” cried BoisronDET, hotly. “I would His Majesty of France could see and know. Methinks he would soon set things straight with a high hand if he could hear how his best and bravest subjects are being treated.”

The insolence of the chevalier became more and more unendurable. It was very plain to the few who had the interests of the colony at heart, that his object was to so disgust and dishearten Tonty, as to drive him and his faithful few away from the place, and then it would be an easy task to so manage matters that the whole colony should break up and dwindle away before the return of La Salle. Of course, De Baugis would not dare to take any open steps for this end so long as the faithful followers of La Salle remained; but if he could

succeed in rooting out these, and so be free to use his unscrupulous methods without fear of their being reported elsewhere, he would soon make short work of this first achievement of La Salle's, and then, perhaps, the whole of the chimerical plan would collapse like a pricked bladder.

Tonty was keen enough to see through the workings of his crooked mind, and was resolved that, come what might, he would not be driven away. He would ignore hints, despise insult, meet haughtiness with contemptuous silence—do anything, in fact, rather than relinquish the task he had undertaken, and leave Fort St. Louis to its fate.

He had seen other forts destroyed by malicious hands before now, and the labour of months, or even years, thrown away in a few days. If he could save Fort St. Louis from this fate, he would certainly do it; and he dispatched Swanalulu through the wilderness to try to overtake La Salle in Canada, and warn him of what was going on, that he might tell the king of the machinations carried on by treacherous subjects in his name.

The chevalier was very uneasy when he noted the absence of Swanalulu, and was curtly told by Tonty that he had been dispatched with letters for La Salle, which it was important that he should receive before he sailed for France. De Baugis tried to bluster out something about Tonty's having no right to dispatch messengers unknown to himself; but the answer re-

ceived was that Swanalulu was the servant of the Dautrays, not one of the garrison, and for once the chevalier was too uneasy to provoke Tonty further.

He modified his behaviour slightly after that, and was rather less overbearing and supercilious; but already he was beginning to be disliked and distrusted by the Indians, and their eager and pertinacious inquiries as to when La Salle would return irritated him into very unwise replies.

Do what Tonty could to prevent it, it became evident to the Indian tribes that the new commander was neither friendly towards themselves nor loyal to their absent hero.

“Have a care, chevalier, how you betray yourself before these people,” said Tonty to him one day, with something of cutting contempt in his tone. “We have all striven to give you honour in the sight of these wild Indians, whose enmity often means death; but if you persist in showing them contempt and unfriendliness, on your own head be your blood, if they arise and slay you. The *Sieur de la Salle* is the very apple of their eye. For him they will do anything—even to the laying down of their lives. If you show your hostility to him, they will at once regard you as an enemy. You may succeed in undoing the colony, and in securing its final overthrow, but you run a great chance of meeting death at their hands; and the death which infuriated Indians are wont to wreak upon their foes is one which you would not care to court, if

you had seen as much of their methods as I have done."

At those words the chevalier grew pale with fear, and asked if these gentle-seeming Indians were fierce and bloodthirsty like the Iroquois?

"When their blood is up there is almost nothing to choose between tribe and tribe," answered Tonty in the same cool, curt fashion. "If you are wise, in your own interests, chevalier, you will not make yourself out the foe of La Salle."

The chevalier took the hint, and was more guarded in the future, but his hatred and fear of Tonty increased visibly, as did also his dislike to the life upon the rock, and his impatience of the long monotony and endless round of idle days.

He neither hunted nor put his hand to any toil, as La Salle had always been foremost to do, whilst his dread of the Indians now kept him almost entirely within the fort, where he paced up and down like a caged wild beast.

"Perhaps we shall be rid of him soon after all," Boisrondet would say sometimes with sparkling eyes, as he watched the gloomy countenance of the chevalier and his followers. "It needs men to be trained and brought up to this sort of life that they may be able to stand it."

Whether or no the chevalier was contemplating withdrawal from his present position, at least he was unable to make it immediately, for after a certain

number of disquieting rumours (to which, however, they were growing accustomed) had been brought to the fort concerning the threatened activity of the Iroquois, a day came when Swanalulu himself, returning post-haste from Canada, where he had found La Salle, and to whom he had delivered his letters and reports, brought serious tidings.

The Iroquois were indeed massing together with the intent to fall upon the Illinois and the western tribes, if possible, to exterminate them, or at least to drive them far away to the south.

And only three days later, whilst Tonty was seeking to do all in his power to guard his colony against these inroads, white-faced scouts came fleeing up to the fort with the cry upon their lips,—

“The Iroquois! The Iroquois! The Iroquois are upon us!”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DREAD IROQUOIS.

CONFUSION and terror reigned everywhere.

From far and near terrified Indians came fleeing towards the fort to beg the protection of the French against the common foe.

It was no false alarm this time. The Iroquois were on the march, and had vowed to sweep the white men from the face of the earth, and scatter the feeble alliance which they had formed amongst the western tribes.

The Illinois, never a warlike race, and now with the recollection of their late defeat and slaughter fresh in their minds, were almost paralysed with terror; and their fear quickly communicated itself to the rest of the colony, and caused some amongst the settlers around the forest to betake themselves hastily away to their own country, if this happened to lie outside the probable inroads of the Iroquois aggressors.

At Fort St. Louis all was excitement and stir. De Baugis was a soldier and a brave enough man in face of a civilized foe, whose tactics he was able to understand and repel; but his heart misgave him sorely

in this lone wilderness, surrounded by hordes of wild savages, with whose language he was unacquainted, in whose ways he had no experience, and who looked upon him with distrust, even whilst they clamoured for his protection.

“By all that’s fair,” he exclaimed angrily to the little knot of his own personal followers, who were as much perturbed as himself—“by all that’s right and reasonable, I have had enough of this! Let me but once see my way to a safe journey back to Canada, and this hope-forsaken rock in the wilderness shall see me no more! This is no place for His Majesty’s soldiers. It is only fit for madmen and savages! La Salle may be fool enough to throw away his life for a mere shadow, but I have more respect for mine. Let me get rid of these advancing savages, and drive them back to their own country, and I will leave this place as soon as travelling can be safely accomplished. Back shall I go to Quebec, and give word to the governor what sort of a colony this is. None but a madman would remain in such a wilderness amongst a crew of howling savages, who may rise at any moment and tear him in pieces!”

The men about him broke into exclamations of satisfaction and joy. They were no more in love with the life on the rock than their commander, and their words were whispered abroad throughout the camp, to the infinite satisfaction of the older inhabitants.

For the moment, however, the pressing character of

the common peril drew all together. The commander called for Tonty to take counsel with him, and it was soon apparent to all that he was the real head, although De Baugis still held the nominal command in the fort.

“We must put all the Indians upon the farther bank of the river,” Tonty said, having considered the situation beforehand, and knowing exactly the tactics he meant to oppose to any invasion of the Iroquois. “The enemy’s advance must be from north and east, therefore they will arrive first upon this left bank of the river. All the Indians who cannot be accommodated in the fort must cross the river and encamp along the right bank, where they will have the protection of the river; and since the Iroquois cannot very well have any number of canoes with them, it is probable that they may not attempt to attack them under the very noses of our guns.”

For the fort was provided with six small fieldpieces and a fair supply of ammunition. All the soldiers had muskets and were trained marksmen, and numbers of the Indians had firearms of their own, and knew how to use them pretty effectively.

Just opposite to Fort St. Louis the little river Pestekouy found its way into the Illinois, and then doubled back and ran parallel with it for some distance. In the loop thus formed between the two rivers lay a number of wooded knolls, and Tonty’s soldier eye had long taken in this spot as the one which would afford most

shelter and protection to a body of persons encamped there, should the danger of invasion threaten them.

All these things he quickly pointed out to De Baugis, and the two combined to give orders accordingly.

Tonty had perforce to take the foremost place, since he was acquainted with the language of the Indians, and was accounted their friend, whilst the new commander had contrived to inspire both dislike and distrust. There were not lacking those who declared that it was his doing that the Iroquois had come upon them, and that they would not have dared to attack any place defended by the gallant La Salle. Tonty checked these whispers, and taught the people sense as far as he was able; but he could not inspire them with any respect or confidence in their commander, and they would only look to him and answer to his word.

“I retire in your favour, sir,” said De Baugis, with haughty nonchalance, when he began to realize the true state of affairs. “What was reported in Canada is true. The *Sieur de la Salle* has made himself a king; and none save those who rule in his name have a chance with these savages. I leave you to do the best you can. I will have nothing more to do with this mad enterprise; and so soon as the road is clear again, I will leave you to your subjects, and return whence I have come. The life upon this miserable rock is not fit for a French soldier and gentleman.”

Tonty flushed slightly and drew himself up with a gesture of pride; but all his reply was,—

“The chevalier is master of his own actions. With them I have no concern. My place is here, where the *Sieur de la Salle* left me. With the actions of others not under my command I have nothing whatever to do.”

But he was busy enough during all those days of alarm and anticipation. The Indians were scared and unruly, and it needed all his tact and coolness to cope with the situation. *Gaspard* and *Claude* were his right-hand men at this juncture, for their long residence with him before amongst the *Illinois* had given them an influence with Indians that stood them in good stead now.

Some of the savages were full of warlike ardour, and would do nothing but paint and feather themselves, and indulge in wild dances and the exhibitions of mock fury which seemed to be the necessary preparatory for stirring their courage up to the fighting pitch. These were professedly eager to be led forth against the *Iroquois*, and were disposed to be indignant and contemptuous when told that attack formed no part of the *Frenchmen's* scheme; they were to act only on the defensive; retiring behind the walls of their fort, or behind the wide flowing river, and awaiting there the advance of the enemy, as to go out and meet them in the woods would be madness, and a needless running into peril. But when the war-fever came upon the warriors, and they had wound themselves up to a frenzy of fury which drowned alike fear and caution, it was difficult to persuade them to any sort of prudence and

obedience; and Tonty and his men had hard work to get their excited crew into anything like order.

A certain number of picked warriors from various tribes were invited to form a part of the garrison of the fort itself. These were all good marksmen, and had guns of their own; and when once they came under the personal influence of Tonty and his trained band of soldiers, they threw aside their wild excitement and became steady and dependable.

They were perhaps elevated in their own estimation at being thus selected for garrison duty, and in their desire to emulate the white men, they assumed a grave dignity of bearing which was eminently satisfactory to those in command.

Then came the task of getting all the women and children and old people across the river; and this was a matter of some difficulty, owing to the terror and excitement which prevailed. Every moment some alarm of the approach of the Iroquois arose, and the nervous would scuttle off, like rabbits to their burrows, necessitating a fresh collecting and marshalling before the transit could be accomplished.

Tonty and his assistants showed great good temper and patience under these delays, and as usual, succeeded at last in inspiring confidence and courage.

After a time the rumours of attack ceased, and all the Indians gave themselves up, heart and soul, to the task of getting themselves and their belongings carried across the river; and then, feeling themselves for the

moment secure from the invaders, they were eager and willing to intrench themselves according to the orders of Tonty, and throw up in their rapid, clever fashion huts and lodges by the score, so as to present in quite a short time the aspect of a thriving colony.

The Illinois town, with its numerous population, lay on the other side of the river, though not within the sheltering fork formed by the tributary Pestekouy. This place had been already intrenched and fortified according to certain hints given by Tonty long ago, and was in a tolerable state of defence, provided its inhabitants were not seized with panic. After the Indians had all been carried across—save a body of warriors, who resolved to remain and repel the advance of the enemy—there only remained Fort St. Louis itself upon the left bank of the river; and as Tonty remarked to his men with a grim smile, they would be wonderful warriors who forced themselves into the fort, in the teeth of the fire which would be poured down upon them.

The rock was absolutely impregnable on all sides save the landward, and the approach from that was only by a narrow pathway, precipitous and difficult, and now raked by the fire of two field-pieces and many muskets.

It would take, indeed, a bold company to storm that rock, and for themselves the little garrison had no fears. If the Iroquois directed their attacks upon it alone, all would be well. The trouble would be if they should

attempt to build a fleet of canoes beyond gun range, and seek to invade the Indians on the other side of the river. The garrison might thus be forced to quit the shelter of their rock to go to defend their allies, in which case misfortune might befall them. But Tonty had taken care that all the intrenchments should be well within range of his fieldpieces, and therefore any attack made upon these could be answered by a smart cannonading from the fort; and it was not probable that the naked Iroquois warriors would care to submit long to the tearing of shot and shell among their defenceless bodies.

Three days wore away, and the Indians worked with a will at their ditches and mounds. The work progressed apace, and no sign had as yet been seen of the approaching foe.

Night fell, and the warriors upon this left bank lit their fires, and danced and shouted round them like so many maniacs, waking the echoes of the forest, and drowning all other sounds which might perhaps tell of the stealthy approach of some foe.

Tonty, for whom there was no sleep that night, stood with Gaspard beside him looking over the ramparts, and gazing with a sort of pitiful contempt upon those dancing painted figures just below.

“I wish they had crossed the river like the rest. They have maddened themselves with their singing and dancing; but they will be no match for the Iroquois when the day of battle comes. If they would but seek

shelter behind the palisade of the fort, we could make shift to give them standing room there; but nothing will serve them save to go forth hand to hand against the foe. I fear they will pay for their temerity with their lives. But when the war-fever seizes hold upon the young warriors, argument and entreaty are alike useless."

"I wish they would not make such a hideous clamour," answered Gaspard, who was gazing intently out over the forest. "Methought I saw a light over yonder not long since; but it flickered only a short while and went out, or it has been swallowed up in the glare of these nearer fires. I have a feeling that the Iroquois are creeping, creeping very near us. They are wily as well as savage foes; and they know that they have white men to deal with now. Doubtless they will use all caution, and strive to take us unawares."

"They will not do that," answered Tonty, with a slight, grim smile. "But they may fall unawares upon yon shouting crowd beneath. Where is Swanalulu? Canst thou not send him thither to speak sense and seek to quiet them. I would not have them throw away their lives; and they are more like madmen than warriors now."

"Swanalulu crept to the forest at dusk to see if he could discover any traces of the approach of the Iroquois," answered Gaspard. "I am on the watch for his return every moment. I think he is too cunning and astute to fall into the hands of the enemy; but woe betide him if he do!"

A few moments later and the youth pointed to some object dimly discerned by him, which at first Tonty's eyes could not distinguish, and he exclaimed excitedly,—

“It is Swanalulu returning! I am sure of it! And see! he goes to the camp; he is speaking to the warriors! Their singing dies suddenly down; they stand quiet and crowd round him. Now they are seizing their weapons, and trampling out their fires! That can mean but one thing—the Iroquois are close at hand!”

The next minute the dusky figure of the stalwart Indian was seen running with the ease of long familiarity up the steep and rugged path, answering the challenge of the sentry as he did so. In another moment he had leaped the palisade without pausing for the gate to be opened, and was standing before Gaspard and Tonty.

“They are close at hand! They are stealing like wild cats through the forest; they mean to fall upon us unawares, and take the fort by sunrise. I crept into the tree-tops overhead, and listened whilst some of the chiefs conferred together. They know but little of our strength and our plans; but they know that there is a white man's fortress here in the wilderness; and that fortress they have vowed to take and demolish, so that they can then fall upon their Indian rivals and slaughter them at their leisure. It is Fort St. Louis which will be the mark for attack. They cannot believe that a handful of men can hold out against their thousands of bold warriors. They are pledged to the anni-

hilation of the fort. Methinks they have even received bribes and presents from other white men. They spoke of the riches and glory that would flow in to them if they succeeded; yet I scarce think they expected to take a rich spoil here in the wilderness."

Tonty's lips set themselves into firm lines, and Gaspard exclaimed in hot indignation,—

"Now, is it not a shame that here in this wilderness white man should league with treacherous and blood-thirsty Indian against his own white brother? Surely so evil a scheme must come to naught. Surely the God of heaven and earth will look down and give us the victory."

"And whither go our friendly warriors?" asked Tonty of Swanalulu. "You have given them warning of the approach of the foe?"

"Yes, and they vow they will go forward and fall upon them suddenly, and put them to the rout. I have cautioned them to use all care; but their hearts are hot with fury, and go they will."

Tonty slightly shook his head.

"They are maddened and blind. I can say no more. They must go their own way. Gaspard, go rouse the garrison. Bid every man to his post. The dawn will break ere many hours have passed, and the Iroquois may be upon us any moment."

In a few short minutes the fort was alive with human forms. There was almost no noise, silence being strictly enjoined; but it was known that the enemy

was close at hand, and the hearts of all beat high with anticipation and the excitement of coming battle.

Well did every man amongst them know that upon the saving of Fort St. Louis hung the whole fate of the promising little colony, and their own lives to boot. If once the fierce and cruel Iroquois succeeded, through sheer force of numbers, in forcing the palisade and capturing the fort, then nothing but a hideous death lay before every white man there; a war almost of extermination would follow, waged with the western tribes; and the notable scheme of La Salle for the colonization of the great West would become nothing but an idle dream.

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken by a hideous din—yells, shrieks, war-whoops, the whizz of arrows, the sound of ringing blows, and all that frantic furious clamour that bespoke an Indian battle.

“The warriors have met the Iroquois in the forest,” exclaimed Tonty in a low voice. “The fight has already begun. I fear me our allies will be cut down and hewn in pieces ere an hour has passed.”

“Captain, let me forth!” cried Gaspard, with sudden eagerness. “Send me to their aid with a few picked men who can handle guns. We cannot let our allies bear all the onset, and stand at ease and idle behind our entrenchments. Let us go to them. Bid me lead forth a small band. We need not go far. They are but in the fringe of the forest yonder; and our guns will cover our retreat if we are borne back.”

Tonty hesitated a moment. He needed all his resources within the walls; and Gaspard was dear to him, and too good a man to lose. But these warriors were in very truth their allies and friends. If they were rash and disobedient, that was their untrained savage nature, and could not be regarded as a crime. To let them be cut to pieces almost in sight, and send no force out to their aid, was scarce to act as a worthy ally. In days to come the Indians might think of this, and seeds of distrust might be sown. After hastily reviewing the situation for a few minutes, the captain gave reply,—

“Go then; but use all discretion. Stand firm, and depend on your guns. Come not at close quarters; and if the onrush be heavy, retire in order, till we can protect you with the guns. Go, but be not rash. We have no lives to throw away. I trust you, Gaspard Dautray, so remember this.”

Gaspard made a sign of assent. He was not likely to forget. In another minute the palisade gate was thrown open, and he was marching forth at the head of a little compact band, seven of whom were white men, and the rest Indians armed and clad after European fashion, and looking as steady and well disciplined.

Gaspard knew every inch of the country, and could judge exactly where the fight was raging. He defiled his men carefully and noiselessly down the path, then deflected his line a little, and brought them up towards a woody knoll which he judged would overlook the

scene of the struggle, whilst giving them shelter from the enemy.

“The lad is a born soldier!” exclaimed Tonty, who from the ramparts was watching the manœuvre. “He could not have taken a better line.”

And then he went amongst the gunners, directing them how to place their guns so as to cover the path which the little band would most likely have to take, when forced to fall back and make for the fort, should the Iroquois warriors charge them.

The pale light of the dawn was just beginning to illumine the sky as Gaspard led his men cautiously up the knoll, and came in sight of the fierce fight raging between the rival tribes. It was easy to distinguish friend from foe, for the Iroquois, from their long march, had been unable to adorn themselves with the paint and feathers that the Indian warrior loves when about to meet his foe.

“Steady, men,” said Gaspard, kneeling down, and taking a careful aim. “Mark every one his man. Let every shot tell. Fire a volley, load quickly, then fire once more. After that, stand up ready for the word of command. If they charge us, we must fall back—but always in order. Once free from the forest belt, and our guns will cover our retreat. We must rally our friends about us, and show a bold front, fire steadily as we go, and get all safely back within the fort.”

The next moment the wood was ablaze with a line

of fire, as the little company let fly their bullets into the midst of the advancing and triumphant Iroquois.

A yell of fury, pain, and terror instantly arose, and it had not died away before a second volley poured in upon the close ranks of the assailants, whilst the bold warriors who had advanced to repel them, and were being overmatched on all sides, knew now that their allies had come to their aid, and sought to join them, uttering shouts of triumph and joy.

“Steady, men, steady!” said Gaspard once again, as this rush of their own friends almost scattered and overwhelmed them. “Rise and fire once again. Then fall in and march towards the fort. They will be upon us in a minute. Stand firm and give them a volley; then back-march as quickly as you can.”

The Iroquois, taken aback for a moment, and thrown into temporary confusion by the fall of one of their most notable chiefs, had now rallied and gone after their retreating Indian foes in a wild, blind charge. It was well that Gaspard’s nerve was good, and that his little band was able to stand steady; for it was a terrible sight to see these furious Indians coming on in a compact mass, brandishing their weapons, uttering savage shouts and yells, and bent upon an indiscriminate slaughter.

“Fire!” said Gaspard, giving the word in firm tones, and the next moment the volley rang out. It met the oncoming rush, and the leading men dropped by the score. For a minute the remainder wavered and re-

coiled, and during that minute Gaspard got his men out from behind the thicket into the open space, cleared purposely long since, around the fort; and ere the leading ranks of the Iroquois could form up and rush upon them, a booming overhead told that a cannon shot was hurtling through the air, and next moment a wild shriek from the assailants showed that it had found its mark amongst them.

“Back to the fort, men; keep rank, but quick march!” ordered Gaspard, himself keeping in the rear, and nearest to the Iroquois, and directing his men with the coolness and steadiness of one long habituated to peril.

The Iroquois saw and understood the intention of their foe, and made a rapid and vigorous onslaught, seeking to cut them off from their place of safety. For one moment it seemed as though nothing could stop their rush, neither the steady fire from Gaspard’s band, nor the hurtling cannon shot roaring from the fort. Gaspard found himself surrounded by furious, threatening faces. Voices yelled in his ear, and hands were stretched out to clutch at him and drag him from his followers. He well knew that only the desire of capturing him alive saved him from the fatal blow of the tomahawks that were being brandished all around. “Could anything save him?” he asked of himself, whilst still seeking to retire towards his men, but finding himself hemmed in by a ring of fierce faces.

Suddenly there was a sense of fresh pressure, a yelling and a firing so furious and so well directed that

the warriors about him suddenly dropped away one after the other, and the clasp of the detaining hand upon his limbs unbent. Gaspard wrenched himself free with a violent effort, and sprang back towards his own men, who had charged furiously down the hill again to his rescue.

From the fort there resounded a perfect volley of musket and cannon shot. The Iroquois wavered and their lines broke. Next minute Gaspard was carried through the gate of the fort, breathless, bleeding, dazed, and only half conscious, to be received with open arms by Tonty himself, who exclaimed with unwonted enthusiasm,—

“ Well done ! well done, gallant Gaspard ! Our great commander, La Salle himself, could not have achieved a more brilliant success. Our friends are gathered in and rescued from peril. Our foes have received a check which has discomfited and alarmed them, and we have not lost a man. Well done ! well done, good youth ! If all had thy spirit and courage, we should have no fears for the result of this campaign.”

For the moment the enemy were discomfited, and retired to the forest to recruit their numbers and to decide upon their next step. For the whole of that day they remained hidden amongst the trees, and Tonty permitted no one to leave the fort.

At dawn of the following day a concerted and furious attack was made upon Fort St. Louis, and the resources of the garrison were taxed to the uttermost

to repel it ; for although the Indians had few guns, and were driven back and cut to pieces in a terrible way by the well-directed fire of the garrison, yet their numbers were so enormous, and their courage so ferocious, that they swarmed up the path despite the volleys poured into their ranks, and seemed at times as though they would carry the palisade and force their way into the fort through sheer weight.

It was a gallant display of courage on both sides ; and within the fort great anxiety reigned. The garrison's loss was not heavy, owing to their defences ; but the constant watchfulness required both by day and night made their duty very heavy.

For six long, weary days and nights did the siege and assault last, and De Baugis was reduced to despair ; even the courageous Tonty sometimes felt as though the overpowering weight of numbers must tell at last.

But upon the seventh day it seemed as though the power and perseverance of the enemy were exhausted. No sign was heard from the forest ; and after a whole day of silence, scouts were sent forth, and returned with the news that the Iroquois were in retreat to their own country.

They had had enough of European warfare. They had been decimated by French guns. They would henceforward, it might be hoped, leave the western tribes and their alliance in peace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST AND FOUND.

“GASPARD! Claude! Now what means this? What spirits of the air have told you, that ye come like ghosts or like dreams, just when we have said, ‘Oh, if Gaspard were but here’?”

“Nay now, good Louis, but what means this confusion and dismay in the Home of Peace? And what manner of greeting is this with which you meet us after our long absence?”

Louis Dautray, now a fine-looking man, and the acknowledged civil head of this little southern colony, looked from face to face, and put up his hand as though bewildered and confused.

“You have heard naught, then? Nay, but how should you, seeing we have but just known it ourselves. But what has brought you thus suddenly to our valley?”

“That will we explain anon. It is a long tale we have to tell. But what is the reason of thy wild looks? Why doth Ruvanni stand aside with white cheeks, and never a greeting for us? What has happened? Are we ghosts, that ye are terrified at the

sight of us? Where is Mary? where is Father Fritz? Methinks they will have a warmer welcome for us. Speak, good cousin, what aileth thee?"

Ruvanni, who had stood mute all this while, gazing at Gaspard as one half distraught, suddenly rushed towards him and fell upon her knees at his feet, grasping his hand and crying out wildly,—

"Oh, Heaven be praised that thou art here! Thou wilt find her! Thou wilt save her! I said, when first the terrible thing was made known to us, 'Alack, if Gaspard were but here, all would be well!' and lo, Heaven has sent thee as if at our call."

Gaspard's face suddenly paled. He grasped Ruvanni by the hand and drew her to her feet. His own bronzed face had caught the anxious fear of hers.

"What dost thou speak of, Ruvanni? Tell me! What has befallen? Where is Mary?"

She covered her face with her hands.

"Alack! alack!" she wailed, "that is what we are all asking to-day. Where is Mary? Where is the sweet Mayflower? And what can we say to whom the care of her was entrusted? Where is she? Where is she? Alas, none knows, none can say!"

Gaspard's lips were very white as he turned suddenly upon Louis, and demanded with a flash in his eye,—

"Tell me plainly the meaning of all this. I cannot bear suspense. Something has happened to Mary. What is it? Hide nothing from me. I can bear everything save ignorance."

“I will tell all I know,” answered Louis; “indeed, I desire nothing better. Thou knowest that Mary is an angel of mercy in this place, not only to the sick amongst ourselves, but also if our Indian neighbours be smitten. When fever or ague or any other ill smites them, they send at once for Father Fritz, and where he goes, Mary almost always goes with him. She has become wellnigh as notable a leech as he, and for the tending and nursing of the sick there is none like her. It chanced that a week ago Father Fritz started to visit some of his scattered converts, who dwell hither and thither in these southern lands. Three days ago, in his absence, there came a message from our friends, a company of Kappa Indians, with whom Mary has often lived awhile, and who are singularly gentle and kind, to say that illness had broken out amongst them, and that they needed medicine for it. Mary at once said she would go, and I took her myself, thinking no ill. It is but over yonder, a mile away; you can see the smoke of their camp from yonder knoll. She had been many times before. They loved her, and she loved them, and was safe amongst them.”

Gaspard drew a long breath.

“Where is she now?” he asked, hoarsely.

“Would that I knew,” answered Louis. “I left her there after passing one night amongst them myself. It was but yesterday. Just one short hour ago a message came from them asking if Mary would not return to them, as the sick were asking pitifully for her. We

answered in amaze that she had never left them, that she was still there. But the messengers shook their heads, and answered that she had returned here in the evening, promising to come again the following day."

"And she had not come?"

"Alas! no," answered Ruvanni; "we have seen nought of her."

Louis took up the thread of his narrative and answered,—

"It is even as Ruvanni has said; she has not been here. When questioned, the messengers told this tale. Yestere'en she went forth into the meadows to seek for some herbs she wanted. Night fell and she came not back; but just at dark there came a message, brought by an Indian—a stranger to the Kappas—to say that Mary had been obliged to return hither in search of the remedies she needed, but that after passing the night in her own home, she would return upon the morrow to her sick patients in the Indian village. This message they received in good faith, and thought nothing of her absence till noon to-day. Then, since she had not come, they sent and asked for her, and thus it has come to our knowledge that since eventide last night she has vanished from our ken, no man knows whither."

Gaspard smote the palms of his hands together.

"I know," he cried; "it is even what she once told me. The treacherous Quinipissas have stolen her away. Did she not speak of her fear of this? They have waited, and watched, and bided their time; and now in

the absence of Father Fritz, whom they half fear and half love, they have done this evil thing. But they shall not succeed in their purpose. Mary is my betrothed wife, and I will save her from them."

Louis and his wife exchanged quick glances.

"Is it so, indeed? It might be, truly. A year ago I should have said the same, but of late we have seen and heard nothing of the Quinipissas; they have troubled us not a whit. We thought they had forgotten their desire; even Mary herself had ceased to fear them. We had heard a rumour that their sun-prince had found him a bride."

"That might but be a ruse to deceive you, and lull her into a false security," cried Gaspard. "That lying message brought by an unknown Indian tells a tale of treachery. I am certain that she has been carried off; let us lose not a moment, but follow after her. She is no coward, my fair and faithful Mary. She will prove no easy victim, even though they have her in their hands. And ere they have ceased to seek to win her by guile, and have resorted to the harsher method of force, we shall have come up with them, and have wrested her from their power; or, at least, if it is not Heaven's will that I should save her, we can but die together."

"Nay, talk not of dying," cried Louis; "we will stand by you, and we will win back your bride for you. But you must eat and drink, and rest a brief while ere we start forth again; for I shall muster the men, and

we need to lay up provision for the way. No enterprise is well done that is not well begun, and the Quinipissas are an indolent and idle race. They will not hurry along with their prize as would the warlike tribes of the north. Be advised by me, good Gaspard; we shall rescue her yet, if indeed thy surmise be right, which now I truly believe."

Gaspard could scarce endure the delay of an hour, but he knew that Louis was right; and, indeed, both he and his brother stood in need of rest and refreshment, though he could hardly be persuaded of it.

Ruvanni set food before them, and whilst she served them, she asked eagerly of La Salle, of Tonty, of the great enterprise to which they were pledged. It was now nearly two years since the former had visited them, and they hoped by this time to have received news of some new success on his part, but nothing save vague and shadowy rumours had reached them, and eagerly did they desire tidings from the north.

Gaspard and Claude had but little news to give. La Salle was still away. He had sailed for France, but had not yet returned. From Canada came vague rumours that he had been favourably received, that the governor La Barre had been reprimanded by the king, and that La Salle was preparing a fresh company, and was coming west again with new and increased powers.

"It is this rumour which brings us here," said Gaspard, in telling his tale. "All men think that the

commander will this time avoid Canada and his enemies there, and will land at the river's mouth, and so work upwards. Captain Tonty has reckoned that he may be expected perhaps this year, albeit it may not be till next: there is no knowing what delays may arise in the fitting out of such an enterprise. But be that as it may, he has desired that we come down south to await his return in these latitudes."

Ruvanni clasped her hands together in token of delight.

"Nay, but that is welcome news. Then thou wilt make a home with us till the commander returns?"

"If you will have us," answered Gaspard, looking with a smile into Ruvanni's eager face. "It is our noble captain's wish that, since at Fort St. Louis all is quiet, and seems likely to remain quiet, and since the harassing by foes both within and without has ceased, we should be on the watch for the expedition nearer to the river's mouth; and so soon as we receive news of its approach, we shall send prompt word to him of its arrival, and he will hasten down with all speed to greet our commander in person. But, till he is known to be in the country, the captain feels it not compatible with duty and obedience to leave his rocky stronghold."

At that moment Louis reappeared, having given his orders, and being all eagerness to learn something of his cousins' story.

The existence of the far-away colony of St. Louis was known to the inhabitants of the Home of Peace,

for Father Fritz had made the journey thither during the last summer, shortly after the final departure (in deep disgust at the whole thing) of De Baugis and his men. He had brought word south of the thriving nature of the little community, and had it not been for the immense distance which separated the two colonies, there would have been regular communication kept up. As it was, only very vague rumours, passed from mouth to mouth by the Indians, led them to believe that each of them was flourishing and at peace.

Gaspard and Claude had not much to add to the story heard by Father Fritz upon his visit the previous summer. Since the rout of the Iroquois, and the departure of De Baugis, life had flowed on peacefully enough around the lonely rock. The Indians, relieved from their terrors, and more and more convinced that the French were their bulwark of defence, had collected in considerable numbers around the rock, and had grown increasingly friendly and contented beneath Tonty's genial rule. They even showed no impatience or distrust at La Salle's long absence. They were at peace with one another, and relieved from pressing cares; and so long as they had food to eat, and a certain amount of brandy to drink, and were appeased from time to time by a small present of cloth, or beads, or knives, they appeared in no way disposed to depart from their present quarters.

Since the rumour of La Salle's kindly reception at the French court had been brought to Canada, nobody

had sought to molest his little colony. The traders sent with furs were permitted to return with the needful goods for the community; and though at present Tonty contented himself with small undertakings, he was laying by a goodly store of furs, ready to load a vessel for France so soon as La Salle should bring it up the river for that purpose.

Louis also told his cousins that their stores had grown mightily during these past two years. Let La Salle and his vessels appear, and he would find an immediate reward for his long and patient toil.

All these things were hastily discussed whilst the repast was being eaten. Gaspard could scarce give his attention even to such interesting themes as these, he was in such a fever to set off in search of his missing love.

“Rest assured they will show her no violence,” said Louis to him, as they prepared to march to their canoes—the best method of travelling towards the city where the chieftain lived who was known to desire Mary as his son’s wife. “They are not a cruel race, and, moreover, the maiden is destined as the bride of the chief’s son, himself a being they regard as half divine. They will treat her with all reverence and care; but it must be our part, if possible, to discover where they take her when they reach the camp, and to meet guile by guile when we have the old chief to deal with, for he is as crafty as a fox.”

The river was reached, and there was Swanalulu

mending the canoe which had brought down Gaspard and Claude from the rock of St. Louis to the Home of Peace. He was at once told what had happened to Mary, and was as full of eagerness as any of the party to follow and rescue her. Many plans were talked over between the cousins as they rapidly descended the river, but Gaspard's was the one at length adopted.

"Listen," he said, after a good many projects had been discussed, "if you will take my advice you will breathe no word of the missing maiden when you reach the town. Let the old fox guess what he will, your pretext shall be something altogether different."

"What shall it be, then?" asked Louis.

"You will tell him that it has come to your ears that La Salle is preparing, and may actually have started upon a voyage from France to the mouth of the Mississippi. None know how soon his sails may be sighted off the coast. Go to him for news of this; ask him if he has heard or seen aught of it. Seem to be occupied altogether with a matter of much greater import than the loss of one maiden from the colony. Take up his time with councils and discussions as to how La Salle shall be received; that will give me time to carry out my project, and methinks I may even find and rescue the maiden whilst the old fox is being cajoled and cozened in the heart of his city."

"Then you come not with us yourself?"

"Not to the city. I will not show my face there. It might be known to some that I was the maiden's

lover, and that would ruin all. Methinks the party that have taken her are travelling by land. We have asked all along the river's banks, and none have seen any canoe pass by. Probably they feared to meet Father Fritz, or some other friendly Indians to whom she might have cried for help, and have chosen the forest tracks as offering more security. If this be so we shall arrive first at the town, and whilst you engross the chief in parley, Claude and I, with faithful Swanalulu, will play our part warily and well. How we shall act remains to be seen; much depends on the temper of the people, and what we find awaiting us. But never fear for us; we have lived amongst Indians too long to be in doubt or danger. Only let our lurking near at hand be hidden from the chief, we will contrive the rest."

Louis looked thoughtfully at his companions.

"I will do all I can. Of late the old chief and all the Quinipissas have been much more friendly than of old; I trust them not altogether, but they plainly seek rather to be our friends than our foes. It is possible that the old fox will seek to arrange with me for the marriage of his son with our Mayflower. He may suggest it as the basis of an alliance with us and with La Salle. I would that we had Father Fritz with us to counsel us in this difficulty. If he should speak thus to me, how shall I answer him?"

"Father Fritz would always bid us speak the plain truth," put in Claude, with sudden earnestness; "of that

I am very sure. Were he here with me, methinks he would walk straight to the lodge of the chief, tell him why and wherefore we had come, and bid him restore the maiden to us."

"Ay, truly," cried Louis, fired with sudden enthusiasm, "that is what he would do; and his eyes would glow with a holy fire, as he would show to the old chieftain the evil he thought to do, and he would tell them how the God who is the God of light, and the Creator of the sun they worship, has no dealings with deeds of darkness, and abhors all who do that which is evil in His holy sight. That is how he would deal with him, even as he deals with all who cross his path. He speaks the truth from his heart, and the Indians themselves know it and fear, whilst they love and almost worship him. He has spoken the truth when to do so seemed as though it must mean instant death, and we who have heard him have shrunk back in fear and amazement. But in very truth the Lord watches over the footsteps of such a man, and His angels guard him in all his ways. But for the rest of us, what must we do? Can we hope to be guided and guarded even as he is?"

"We can, and we will!" suddenly cried Gaspard, and Claude's face lighted with eager fire. "Let us put aside all cunning and all crooked dealing; let us go boldly forward and act even as Father Fritz would have us to do; let us be without fear and without reproach in this matter. Mary herself would be first to say so.

Let us not stoop to any crooked and unworthy methods in bringing her back."

Louis sat awhile in silent thought. He had seen again and again how Father Fritz's fearless methods had triumphed over perils and difficulties in their dealings with the Indians, and he had not lived beneath his spiritual fatherhood all these years for nothing. He lacked the power, the intense living faith, and wonderful spiritual discernment which made Father Fritz such a giant among men, but he was a man of much piety, earnestness, and zeal; and though he had often met subtlety by subtlety and craft by craft, he had come to believe and respect the higher and nobler methods, and to desire to follow after them whenever he could.

"Father Fritz never thinks of results," said Claude, musingly; "he says that these do not rest with us. What we have to do is to obey the law of Christ in every detail, in childlike simplicity, without thinking what will come of it. That is the Lord's part of the work; He will bring results to pass. All we have to do is to obey."

Thus they talked together, seeking to lay aside all thoughts of guile and craft, and to do what was right and honest in the sight of God. And as they spoke of these things earnestly and hopefully, Claude suddenly broke out in a cry of rapture,—

"There he is! there he is!"

"And Mary with him!" shouted Gaspard, giving such a bound as almost overturned the canoe.

It was growing dusk. All eyes were strained in the direction indicated by the eager gaze of Claude and Gaspard. The brothers were driving their frail bark ashore with all the strength of their strong arms. There upon the strand walked two figures side by side, one clad in the long brown habit which was Father Fritz's invariable dress; the other a light female figure, hooded and cloaked, whose form and features could only have been discovered by a lover's eyes. The pair were pacing side by side along the river's bank, and in another moment Gaspard had leaped ashore, and was racing towards them, crying out between his gasping breaths,—

“Mary! Mary! My Mayflower! my sweetheart!”

The two figures on the bank stopped suddenly—stopped short as if in amazement. Then there came a cry of startled rapture, and Mary darted forward and flung herself into her lover's arms.

What a commotion of glad voices surrounded them the next minute, as the party disembarked and came crowding up! Claude was on his knees beside Father Fritz, embracing his hands and asking his blessing, tears of joy and emotion running down his cheeks as he did so. The father lifted him up and embraced him tenderly, and then asked with great interest and affection of their well-being, and of their sudden appearance here.

It was long before the succession of rapid exclamations and eager hurried questions came to an end, and

meantime the Indians had dragged up the canoes, made a great fire, and prepared provisions for the hungry travellers.

Mary and Gaspard were still clinging together as though they would never be able to let go their hold. Mary had been weeping on his shoulder in the plenitude of her joy and relief, and had been able to answer none of his torrent of eager questions. Only when Father Fritz drew her towards him, and bid her sit down between himself and Gaspard and compose herself, and join in giving thanks for this wonderful meeting in the wilderness, was she able to subdue her deep-drawn sobs of excitement and emotion; and even then it was Father Fritz who had to give the account of his meeting with her, and her rescue from the Quinipissas.

It seems that the father had changed the course of his round of visits, owing to his having received information that some amongst his Quinipissa converts were in rather urgent need of his ministrations. He had therefore turned aside and visited them, and whilst he was there he had heard a rumour which caused him some anxiety, and made him send out a faithful Indian to inquire and bring him word again. The man returned with a confirmation of the story. Indeed, it seemed certain that an attempt had been made to carry off Mary, and Father Fritz, having learned what road the party was likely to take on the homeward journey, had quietly waited its return, and had then, with his own peculiar fearlessness and authority,

gone into the midst of the escort, demanded the release of the maiden, and carried her away from them simply by the force of that spiritual and moral power which he possessed over the natives of the whole district.

He did not say this. His story was perfectly calm and quiet; to listen to it one might suppose that it was no strange thing which he had done single-handed against a dozen trusted followers of a great chief. But Mary, nestling up to Gaspard's side in the gathering darkness, whispered in his ear,—

“O my beloved, what shall I liken him to? It was as though an angel of God suddenly stood amongst us. The men were very angry at being interrupted; they crowded about him with their gleaming weapons; their faces were full of anger and fury. He was quite unarmed; you know he never carries aught with him save the staff in his hand. He looked at them with those quiet, fearless, tender blue eyes of his, and he said,—

“‘My children, you know that you are doing what is wrong. You dared not do such an act in the light of day, because it was evil, and your sun-god you thought would have seen you. You do it in the night; but the great God who made your sun-god can see you by night as well as by day.’

“And he spoke to them so beautifully, so clearly, so tenderly, and yet so scathingly, that they stood ashamed and abashed before him. And then he came and loosed the bonds that bound me; they had been

kind, but they had bound my hands so that I could not use them freely. And it seemed as though some spell had fallen upon them, for none moved to lay hands upon him.

“Go, tell your chief what has happened. Tell him that after I have taken the maiden home, I shall come and see him, and talk with him on this very matter. Fear not; he is my friend, he will not hurt you.’ And so they let us go our way, and they went on their own way themselves. And oh, it is so wonderful what Father Fritz can do! Was ever any man like him before?”

Louis was telling the father all that had happened since he left, and how Mary had been stolen away more than twelve hours before any one had an idea of it. Then he spoke of the sudden arrival of the two brothers, of their hasty journey in search of the lost maiden, and of their resolve at the last to do nothing unworthy of that perfect honesty and truthfulness which he had striven to inculcate in all his children.

Father Fritz listened in silence, and a sweet and tender look came into his eyes as he heard the tale, and saw the expressive faces bent upon him in the firelight.

“My children,” he said at the close, very gravely and sweetly, “I am happy in thinking that you have thus judged, thus resolved; for it makes me sure that your hearts are in earnest, and that they are set upon things above, rather than on those beneath. For all who are truly looking and longing for the coming of the Lord there can only be one great object in life, and that is to

be found 'His at His coming.' And how can this be if we are tampering with His truth, fighting with the devil's weapons, stooping to unholy and unworthy actions, and imitating those who through ignorance or hardness of heart have no such hope as ours, and would mock at us if we sought to tell them of it. Let us never stoop to do any act from which we should shrink back with a guilty sense were we to hear the trump of the archangel sounding through the heavens, and know that the day of the Lord had come."

That night the little party slept in peace and security in their camp, and upon the morrow found their way back to the Home of Rest. There Gaspard and Mary were made man and wife by Father Fritz in the beautiful little church, and there they settled down to a calm and happy life, awaiting the news of that fresh enterprise of the ardent-spirited La Salle, which was to turn this great river of the Mississippi into a highway for the wealth of France.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STRANGE FESTIVAL.

“**T**HEN you will still cast in your lot with mine, my faithful Jules? I would have left you master here, if you had elected to stay. You have worn yourself out in my service. Twice have I owed my life to your ceaseless care and attendance. You look something too gaunt and worn for this long and weary march which must lie before us. Art sure thou wilt not remain here, till I can return with help from the north?”

“Sir,” answered Jules, speaking as was his wont, but few words at a time, “I will follow thee to the world’s end. I will never of mine own free will quit thy side.”

La Salle looked upon the young man with a strange softening of his dark, stern face.

“Thy faithful service has had as yet but a poor reward, good lad. Thou hast indeed followed me to the world’s end in many a sense of the word: thou hast stood by me alike in prosperity and in adversity. Of late indeed it has seemed that adversity is to be for ever my lot. Yet even now I do not despair.

Although for two long weary years we have been seeking in vain for this lost river—the goal of our hopes—and have found it not; yet it cannot be that we shall be foiled for ever. And once found, I will show the world that I can yet achieve what I have prophesied.”

The dark face lighted. The eyes shone with a strange anticipation of coming triumph. There was an answering hopefulness in Jules’s smile as he said,—

“Sir, if indeed we cease these fruitless wanderings after the river’s mouth, and travel on and on in a northerly and easterly direction without thinking more of retracing our steps hither as heretofore, it must needs be that at last we come to the great river we have known and vanquished in past years; and once afloat upon its broad bosom it matters little whether we go up or down; we shall find friends along its banks, awaiting our return.”

“That is very true,” answered La Salle; “would we had done this earlier! Would we had not thought so easily to find the river’s mouth! Ah, how fortune has mocked and derided us. That noble armament; those stores and munitions; those two hundred bold men all pledged to the enterprise. And now what have we left? Scarce fifty men; a few hapless women and maids, sick to death of banishment and dying off through disease. This fortress and town of wood, but scantily provisioned; and discontent, discouragement, mutiny rife everywhere. Ah, fickle Fortune, what a jade thou art!”

Small wonder that La Salle should speak thus bitterly; for seldom, perhaps, has one human being encountered such a series of disasters.

Let us for a moment trace the course of his career during the past four years, since he bade adieu to Tonty on the rock of St. Louis and wended his way back to Canada, and thence sailed to France.

His reception at the French court was all that he could have desired. He came at a fortunate moment, when France was greatly irritated by the aggressive attitude of Spain with regard to the New World, and especially by her monstrous claim to the entire rights over the Gulf of Mexico, denying to other nations even the right of entering it.

La Salle's old friend and lieutenant, La Forest, was in France at this time, and brought early word to La Salle of these irritating aggressions. Therefore the latter added to his already colossal projects a new bait in the form of a suggestion for the invasion of Mexico, so soon as the French should have firm hold along the banks of the Mississippi and Red River. And since no scheme with regard to the great unknown New World seemed too vast and fanciful for the ardent imaginations of the French monarch and his counsellors, the memorial presented by La Salle was eagerly read and considered, and he himself was admitted to the royal presence, and permitted to unfold his plans, and to give his own account in person to the king of all his labours, successes, and troubles.

The great monarch was keenly interested in all, and greatly incensed by the conduct of the new governor of Canada. He sent La Forest promptly back thither with injunctions to La Barre to restore to La Salle all the seigniories and properties that had been seized by his creditors—Fort Frontenac amongst them; and speaking in scathing terms of his disapprobation of the hindrances put in the way of La Salle's enterprise.

Moreover, having re-established his prestige in the north, the king entrusted La Salle with a commission of immense magnitude for the enterprise in the south, and granted him vessels and munitions and men—everything, in fact, that he required for the establishment of his colony at the mouth of the great Mississippi.

Four vessels comprised the little armament, of which the *Joly* was the largest—a vessel of thirty-six guns, belonging to the royal navy. The king also presented to La Salle a small frigate called the *Belle*, as his own private and personal property. Another vessel, the *Amiable*, was loaded with every sort of store that the infant colony could require; and above two hundred colonists, including a number of women and girls, were tempted by the king's promises to embark in the little fleet, with a view to the rapid populating of these new lands.

All these preparations had taken time, and it was not till the year 1684 was well advanced that La Salle was able to set sail from La Rochelle. Troubles

began almost immediately between him and his sailing-masters and underlings. The voyage was one perpetual succession of bickerings and mutual recriminations. Disease broke out on board, and when they touched at the West Indian Islands, La Salle himself fell sick of a dangerous fever, whilst the expedition was delayed by innumerable accidents and misunderstandings.

It was not till the following year that they reached the shores of the Gulf of Mexico; and then, alas! although they knew it not, they had missed the mouth of the Mississippi, and were seeking it nearly four hundred miles too far west.

Once, indeed, La Salle believed that he had found it, and set to work to build a new fort of St. Louis at the mouth of the Lavaca—which he later on christened La Vache—where it empties into Matagorda Bay. The character of the low-lying swampy lands and sand bars was not at all unlike those surrounding the mouths of the Mississippi, and for a brief period hope ran high.

But when Jules and the Indian hunters had explored inland, where the Home of Peace should have been, and had found instead only a new country, and Indians whose language and manners were different from anything they had encountered upon the Mississippi, then, indeed, it had been too plain that they had mistaken their course; and many of the colonists lost heart and sailed away secretly in one of the vessels whilst La Salle was prospecting in search of familiar landmarks.

Misfortune followed upon misfortune. The sailing-

master of the *Joly* landed stores and guns, and offered to coast along the shore in search of the Mississippi mouth; but stormy weather setting in, this became a matter of danger and difficulty, and the sailors were clamouring to return to their native country, having done their appointed duty in landing La Salle and his colonists. The *Amiable*, disobeying La Salle's express commands, and entering the bay with her sails spread, ran aground upon a sandbank, heeled over, and became a wreck, and the bulk of the stores provided for the colony perished beyond hope of rescue.

Then the captain of the *Joly* begged leave from La Salle to return to Martinique, and bring fresh provisions from thence; but for some mysterious and inscrutable reason La Salle refused this favour. And shortly afterwards the *Joly* sailed away for France, leaving only La Salle's little frigate *Belle* with her provisions and munitions as the hope and stay of the wretched castaways.

Then commenced a weary and mournful catalogue of disasters. La Salle, confident of quickly finding the Mississippi, spent two whole years in expeditions along the coast or into the interior, every one of which cost the lives of many faithful men, the hunter Nimrod being one of these. Left behind, the colonists themselves did what they could for their own comfort and security, built themselves houses out of the masses of driftwood brought down by the river, hunted and fished, and kept themselves as merry as circumstances

permitted, always hopeful of seeing the commander return with the glad tidings of success.

But each time he returned more downcast than the last, and twice he fell ill of malarial fever, which was gradually undermining the health of the whole colony. The dwindling numbers told a woful tale, and the hearts of the survivors grew heavy and gloomy within them. La Salle's indomitable courage animated a few of his followers, and those few were devoted to him, and never reproached him by word or look; but there were many who began to eye him with unfriendly and hostile glances, and there were mutterings from time to time in silent corners of the camp which bespoke sinister thoughts and purposes, and which sometimes caused the heart of the faithful Jules to beat with sudden apprehension and dismay.

And now the Christmas of 1686 had passed, and had been kept as gaily as circumstances permitted in the southern fort of St. Louis. Twelfth-night had come, and was to be celebrated by a banquet, the best that the colony could furnish. And upon the morrow La Salle, together with about a dozen of his most stout-hearted followers was to start again, this time to return no more till the river had actually been found. Indeed it was now La Salle's purpose to go to Canada, to meet La Forest there, to receive back the moneys and lands which had been seized from him, but which, at the king's command, would be now in the hands of his lieutenant; and having thus the means to equip a

new armament up there in the north, he would return down the Mississippi, and then find his way by sea to this little colony, and carry the survivors back to people some village upon the river.

This project appeared the most feasible—indeed the only one now possible to the diminished garrison. Not long before, the *Belle* had been wrecked during one of La Salle's absences, and therefore all hope of discovering the Mississippi mouth by coasting had vanished. The loss of the *Belle* had been very keenly felt—seeming to cut the colony off from communication with the rest of the world, and leaving it alone in the vast wilderness.

Living was, however, not difficult down there in the south. Buffalo abounded in the locality, and save for the matter of clothing, the residents at the little township could look forward without any very desperate anxiety to another year of waiting. It is true the fever was a merciless foe; but Father Zenobe Membré and Father Anastase Douay, who were again with La Salle, had become skilled in the treatment of patients, and understood the nature of the malady. They were to remain behind, as heads and fathers of the diminished community; and La Salle pledged himself not to return again until he had accomplished the object of his journey.

Anything was better than inaction, and the very thought of this expedition had put fresh life into the hearts of the colonists. It had been a matter of some

difficulty to provide clothing suitable to the travellers, since all stores of such things had been lost in the *Amiable*. But there was no lack of skins, and the women and girls set to work in good earnest to cut and shape the dressed deer-skins into garments. Even the sails of the *Belle* were cut up and used to make coats of for hot weather; and curious and motley was indeed the appearance presented by the party as its various members walked up and down the great courtyard of the fort upon the last evening, looking to their last preparations, exchanging parting injunctions with those left behind, indulging in hopeful auguries for the future, and tending the five horses who were to be their companions upon the long and toilsome journey.

The horses had been an acquisition brought back by La Salle after one of his expeditions in search of the Mississippi mouth. He had obtained them from the Cenis Indians; but as that expedition had cost him twelve men from either fever or accident, the creatures had been rather dearly purchased.

However, they would be useful enough, since they could carry the provisions and arms of the party; and as there was to be no turning back now, but a constant going forward in a north-easterly direction, be the difficulties and dangers what they might, it was certainly an advantage to have strong beasts of burden in the company, to save the strength of the travellers themselves, many of whom had been sorely taxed before.

La Salle, indeed, looked little fit for the journey himself. He had been very ill not long since, and Jules had nursed him with unwavering fidelity and devotion. Neither looked in trim for a long and arduous journey; but the same unquenchable spirit was in both, and neither shrank from what lay before him.

And who were to be their companions upon this last forlorn hope?

The reader has had perhaps too many names inflicted upon him in the course of this narrative, so he shall be spared as far as possible from a number of new ones now. But some must be mentioned that the story of this episode may be understood.

When La Salle was in France, in favour with the king, and the head of a promising expedition to the New World, his relations, hitherto cold and careless in their disposition towards him, began to come forward with offers of assistance and of money; and his elder brother, the Abbé Cavelier, actually enrolled himself as one of the party, together with their nephew Moranget, a young man of some promise, but of a haughty and turbulent temper.

Brother and nephew were still with him, having escaped perils both by land and water. Both were in good health and desirous of joining in the proposed journey, though La Salle would have preferred to leave the abbé behind as his representative at the fort. Then the hunter Nika was of the party, and Jules, ever faithful and devoted, together with another

faithful servant called Saget, who had become personally most attached to La Salle.

So far so good. These were all men who could be depended on, but there were others of a different temper. In particular was a man called Duhaut, a person of considerable substance, who had risked rather large sums of money in this enterprise, and who was becoming not a little wrathful at seeing the disastrous result of the undertaking. Oftentimes he had suddenly launched out into vituperation of La Salle and his methods, and had more than once openly accused him of having lied to the King of France, and cheated them all. The friars generally contrived to appease him and smooth over the dispute, but Jules feared and hated this man, and would have given much to have left him behind.

But come he would, and he could not be ordered back as though he had been a mere servant. He himself had a servant that he called l'Archevêque, a man whom Jules distrusted to the utmost; and he also appeared to have considerable influence over other members of the party—Tessier, the pilot of the *Amiable*, who had been suspected of treachery in the matter of her loss; Liotot, a young surgeon, a man of some promise, but of a violent temper; and Hiens, a German, to whom La Salle had shown many kindnesses, but who had appeared of late to shrink away from him, and to consort always with Duhaut and his companions.

Jules had an uneasy feeling that the party was practically divided into two camps, and that it would behove them to keep a very sharp lookout upon the others. La Salle did not appear to share these misgivings. He, perhaps, had not observed all that Jules had done regarding the attitude of these men. But Jules was certain that a deep rancour and discontent possessed them, and he sometimes wondered whether he ought to speak more plainly to his master before they went forth into the wilderness with him.

Time, indeed, was growing short. If he were to speak at all, it must be now. Suddenly he raised his head, and looked full into the grave and serious face of La Salle.

“Sir,” he said, “can you trust the men who are of our company, and start forth with us to-morrow?”

A curious light crept into La Salle’s eyes.

“I scarce know what it is to trust any man, save thee, my faithful Jules, and here and there a simple Indian, or such a man as the *Sieur de Tonty*—whom Heaven send I may one day see again. For the rest, I have grown used to working with tools which I know at any time may give way beneath my hand and pierce it. This is a thing which has happened again and yet again. Why dost thou speak so? Fear not to tell me what is in thy faithful heart.”

“I scarce know how to frame it in words,” answered Jules, “but I have an uneasy sense of impending danger. I mislike yon Duhaut. He is no friend to

us. He would fain be master of all. I have heard him say as much again and again, if not openly, at least in veiled words. He speaks not so when you are nigh. But oftentimes he doth not note my presence when he speaks high-sounding words to others. And he leads the rest with him. They think much of a man who can boast great things. I dislike and mistrust him."

Jules spoke with unwonted energy and earnestness. La Salle regarded him fixedly for a while.

"Thinkest thou that the people here would sooner have him for master than me?"

"Nay, I know not—but I think not so," answered Jules, with a shake of the head.

"Do they complain of me? Do they say bitter and hard things of me?" continued La Salle, still thoughtfully.

"Not often in my hearing. At times they say they are something too much chidden, and then they will lament that they left their native land for this. But they look ever to you, and regard you as their hope and their head."

"If I did not chide—if I did not show that I would and must be master—thinkest thou that we should be what we are now?" asked La Salle, with a slight grim smile.

Jules looked up eagerly to answer,—

"If it had not been for the rules laid down and kept in your absence by those left in charge, methinks

the whole colony would be by this time dispersed. The men would have run away to the woods as *coureurs de bois*; the women would have been carried off by the Indians, or have died of starvation here."

"So I think," answered La Salle, quietly; "it has been no light task ruling here; that is why I ever and again turned back when I failed to find our goal. I could not leave my children without a head for more than a few months at a time. Now, however, the time has come when this is our last and only hope. I take with me those who would strive most to undermine my authority and overthrow what I have accomplished. I know well that there is danger from these men. There is danger in taking them—there is danger in leaving them. Of the two, I think that to take them with us and have them beneath our own eye is the less evil. But the choice is theirs, not mine. They have said that they will come, and I can scarce refuse them if I would. At least, if they are faithless, we can depend upon our own little body; and thou and I, at least, shall feel at home once more when we reach the basin of the Mississippi, which we *must* come to at last. They know this as well as we do, and self-interest alone will almost keep them loyal, at least, until the worst of the perils are past. It will be no light matter this journey. We shall need all the courage, the hope, the endurance we possess. But these have never failed us yet. I think they will not fail us now."

Jules took La Salle's hand in his, and carried it to his lips. It was his silent method of sealing his devotion by an involuntary act of affection, and La Salle just touched the bowed head with his hand, as though silently answering him.

It was the last quiet moment they had together before the bustle of festivity and departure commenced.

A midnight mass was to be held in the chapel on behalf of the travellers and their journey. The two friars, together with the abbé and another priestly brother, one Maxime le Clerc, all vested and robed—for the holy vestments and vessels had been amongst the things saved from the hapless *Amiable*—stood before the altar, whilst the incense cloud arose, and the voices of the priests chanted and intoned the sacred offices. Within the body of the church all the community of worshippers knelt in adoration, and hearts were uplifted and prayers arose, more earnest, perhaps, if not so articulate as those going up from the altar itself.

After the celebration of the mass the whole party gathered in the great hall, where a banquet had been prepared and laid out by the women. Although many hearts were full of anxiety and foreboding dread, yet an air of joviality pervaded everywhere. La Salle took his place at the head of the great table, with the friars and priests around him, and his party of the morrow clustered near. Below, and at the lesser tables sat the rest of the colonists. After all, they mustered not much

above sixty souls—a sad diminution of the numbers landed there two years before. But they tried not to think of that, and when, according to time-honoured custom, La Salle rose glass in hand to cry, “The king drinks!” the whole company sprang to their feet, glasses were waved, cheers arose, and every semblance at least of merriment and joviality prevailed at the tables.

Dawn had come before the revelry ceased, and with the dawn came the knowledge that the time of departure drew near.

La Salle rose and lifted his hand. Instantly there was a dead silence throughout the hall.

Then the great commander spoke his last address to his hapless little colony, and spoke with a tenderness and winning grace which few gave him credit for possessing. He gently touched upon past misfortunes, but declared that he looked forward hopefully and confidently to the future. The King of France would not forget them. Probably he had already sent out supplies and reinforcements which might arrive at any time. In Canada his old officer and friend was awaiting him, and when once he had received his own again, nothing should hinder his rapid journey to the relief of his children here. Already there was one fort and colony upon the Illinois, and one near to the mouth of the Mississippi. Here away in the west was another. Soon the whole land should own the sway of the King of France, and become a populous and prosperous

New France, whither the best and noblest of her sons would flock with eager ardour. They need not fear these early disasters. The alternative of partial failure always awaited early pioneers; but success crowned their efforts at last, and with success came glory to all concerned. They must not think of the gloomy present, but seek to live in the glories of the future. That was his charge to them on his departure—to keep their hearts and hopes fixed on brighter days to come, and to be faithful to him and to one another.

This speech was received with enthusiasm and acclamation. Men and women alike crowded round La Salle to press his hand, and wish him a safe journey and speedy return. And then they all poured out into the courtyard, where the horses, already laden, stood impatiently pawing the ground.

La Salle looked round him once, gravely saluted the people without attempting to speak another word; and then giving a sign to his immediate followers, set forth into the wilderness to the uncertainties of his long and arduous journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TRAGEDY IN THE WILDERNESS.

“**I** HATE those fellows!” exclaimed Moranget to Jules, looking across the small river which divided the rear party from those in advance, and indicating by his glance Duhaut, his servant, Liotot, and a few others, who had crossed the river in the bull’s-hide boat they had made for the purpose, and were sending it back for the rest of their number by Nika the Indian.

Jules, Moranget, and Saget were the three now remaining to cross, and as they stood together the former broke out into almost savage words of anger and hatred.

“I hate and abominate them. They are liars every one of them, and not a day passes but they give us trouble. They dare not openly oppose my uncle; but they do everything to hamper and impede us. I would to heaven we had left them behind! They are good-for-nothings and care only for themselves. Hast thou not marked the way they draw together and keep away from us? In all sooth we do not want them and their sullen looks. Yet I dislike them, and I long to give them a taste of the discipline they deserve. Were I in mine uncle’s place, I would do it too.”

Jules slowly shook his head.

“I dislike them too—none more so. Yet methinks we must bear with them now. I have seen something too much of ill-blood in the wilderness, and what it leads to. It is better to bear and forbear. We cannot rid ourselves of them here. Perchance if we show patience, they will weary of their petty enmity.”

“Patience!” cried Moranget, hotly. “Patience is a slave’s virtue—I desire it not. Let them but speak to me as they speak sometimes to others, and I will let them see of what my patience is made! Upstart curs!—*canaille!* Why, that fellow they call l’Archevêque, he is but a servant himself, yet he would be treated as one of us. He even dares to answer with insolence when my uncles reprove him for his idleness—and his master backs him! They are an evil crew. I hate them every one. If they mend not their manners I will have a word with one of them some day that they will not soon forget.”

Jules looked a little anxious at this threat.

“Have a care, sir, have a care,” he said. “It is ill work stirring up strife in a camp out here in the wilderness. Believe me I speak the truth. I have seen something of it in past days. I know what too often grows from it.”

“Well, what?” asked Moranget, with careless curiosity.

“Murder,” answered Jules, gravely. “Murder, robbery, desertion. It is better to bear patiently a small annoyance, than to stir up such fiends as those!”

“Small annoyance, quotha!” exclaimed Moranget, quickly. “My good fellow, thou mayest be as patient as the domestic ass; but I am of another blood! I care not to submit tamely to such provocations as are daily offered to us. Moreover, I fear not these men. I was ever brought up to fear no man. And as for murder, let them murder one another—and a good riddance for the rest of us. I wish they would quarrel and fall upon each other. So we should be freed from them and their evil tongues and ways.”

Jules said no more, partly because remonstrance was plainly useless, partly because the boat had by this time returned, and Moranget stepped at once on board. Jules helped Saget to lead down to the river’s brink the horses he was holding, and when all were fairly embarked, the faithful creatures took to the water of their own accord, and swam after them like dogs.

The party had often to cross rivers in this fashion. It was the time of the rains, and the streams, which were numerous, were all swollen and rapid. At first they had made a raft at each crossing-place, but this had become too tedious a method of procedure, and having come across a herd of buffalo, they had singled some of the largest and toughest of the old bulls, and having shot and skinned them, had proceeded to construct a light boat of their hides, which the horses were able to carry during the long marches across forest and prairie.

At night the boat made a shelter for some of them from the rain, whilst the rest covered themselves with

the hides they took from their prey, and camped fairly comfortably beneath. They had meat in abundance as a rule, although there were days when it failed them. One of their chief troubles was the rapid wearing out of their shoes, and the difficulty of obtaining more. They tried wrapping their feet in raw buffalo hide, but this had to be kept constantly wet, or else it cased round the feet like iron. By and by they fell in with a tribe of Indians, from whom they were able to obtain by barter some dressed deer-skins, and with these they made themselves moccasins, and travelled with greater comfort.

Sometimes the heavy rains delayed them for whole days together, and then it was that the inharmonious nature of the party most showed itself. La Salle was impenetrably cold and reserved towards those he did not trust; whilst his nephew was so hot and fiery that friction was constantly arising. The abbé sometimes strove to keep the peace, but the hardships of the unaccustomed journey told heavily upon him, and often he had no attention to spare from his own grievances for the condition of the company.

Jules became seriously uneasy at times; for there came often upon the faces of Duhaut and his companions an ugly, threatening look which was much too significant to be pleasant. They would often keep away from the rest of the party for whole days together, and if summoned to join them for any reason, observe a sullen and obstinate silence, hardly answering even if addressed.

La Salle, however, was too much preoccupied by his own purposes and endeavours to pay much heed to what appeared sometimes to him in the light of trifles. Of a sombre and silent nature himself, he perhaps took less notice of these traits in others ; and he was growing keenly eager, as days and weeks passed by, to hear something from the Indians they were constantly meeting as to the neighbourhood of the great river, which he knew he must eventually strike if he adhered to his present line of march.

So far he had heard nothing definite ; but then he was still ignorant of the languages spoken by these tribes. He could ask a few questions, and make himself understood when he spoke of bartering his beads and knives for their corn and grain ; but when it came to more abstract themes, it was almost impossible to obtain any information. He was also a little afraid of being guided into a colony of Spaniards, if he spoke too much of white men. There was no knowing how far the Spaniards might have penetrated into the interior from Mexico, or by means of their coasting vessels. They laid claim to the whole of this vast tract with the same insistence as the French. La Salle knew that no foes would prove so relentless towards him and his party as the Spaniards, and therefore he was forced to act warily, and hitherto had learned nothing of any value to him either about the great river or the colonies established there.

Meantime the party travelled on as fast as the season

would permit, but were occasionally detained by weather and the illness of one or another. La Salle himself was once ill for a few days, and Jules was made seriously uneasy by a suspicion which came to him that the young surgeon, Liotot, had tried to poison, when he professed to be doctoring him.

Jules distinctly saw him put with great caution some drops from a phial into La Salle's drinking vessel, when he believed everybody in the tent to be asleep. From the extreme caution he observed, and from the stealthy glances he threw around him, Jules felt certain that he had some sinister purpose in hand. He therefore waited and watched, and secretly removed and threw away the potion. He had no animal on which to try its properties, and he only ventured to touch it with his lips before flinging it away. The draught that had been a cooling one before, tasted hot and pungent then, and his lip blistered where the fluid had touched it. After that he kept so close a watch upon his master that Liotot had no chance of renewing the attempt, but Jules felt himself from that time forward regarded as an enemy, and knew that he was included in those whom this band of allies both hated and feared.

It had been told before to the youth that Liotot hated La Salle, and had vowed vengeance upon him, holding him responsible for the death of his brother. This unfortunate young man had accompanied La Salle upon one of his former journeys; but his strength having failed, he had been ordered back to the fort, from which they had not

travelled any very great distance. On the way back he was murdered by a party of Indians, who chanced to fall in with him. This accident had been laid by Liotot at La Salle's door, and had turned the young surgeon into his bitter enemy.

It was therefore no pleasant matter to be tied to such travelling companions through a long and perilous march through the trackless wilderness. Hitherto the country had been partially familiar to La Salle. He had explored much of the region lying east and north of the colony of La Vache, and had often been several months absent from the fort. Now, however, he was approaching the limit of his farthest wanderings, and he was pushing on somewhat hastily, because he had upon one occasion left a quantity of Indian corn and beans in a *cache* in the ground, and as provisions had for a few days been running short, he was anxious to find and open this, and replenish his stores before setting forth into unknown regions.

But La Salle, in spite of his eagerness and readiness of spirit, was not so robust as of old, and not unfrequently he received warnings that he could not overtax his strength with impunity any longer, and must rest himself from time to time.

One of these moments now came, and Jules was eager that he should take a couple of days' rest, letting some of the other members of the party go forward to the *cache* and unearth the hidden hoard, or at least make sure that it was still there.

La Salle consented to this, feeling in sore need of rest, and Duhaut with his friends volunteered for the task of seeking the grain. If they found it, they promised to send back Nika—who knew its whereabouts best—to fetch the horses. Jules was glad to be rid of the dark, saturnine faces of the men whom he had come to regard as his enemies.

They had camped in a pleasant place beside a small river. There was ample provender for the horses, and Nika had constructed, with the assistance of Saget and Jules, a comfortable hut where La Salle could lie at ease on a pile of buffalo skins, and look across the sunny prairie, which was beginning to assume its bright green robe of March.

The rains were abating, the sun shone brightly; the ground was drying up, and travelling promised to be pleasanter and less laborious. If they could secure a store of provisions with which to load the horses, they would be able to push along merrily enough, and there was always the hope ever present with them of suddenly seeing the rolling tide of the great Mississippi lying before their eager eyes, as they mounted some new ridge of rising ground and gazed upon the prospect unfolded.

La Salle lay dreaming of this upon his easy couch, the sunshine about him seeming to gild not only the outward landscape, but also the thoughts of his heart. His brother lounged leisurely beside him, enjoying the respite from travel, and listening with considerable interest to La Salle's explanations of his future plans.

Moranget and Jules sought for game on the wide plain, but met with very little success. They had just enough to make a supper for themselves when night fell, leaving the remnants for a scanty breakfast on the morrow. But by that time Nika would have come back with a bag of grain, and they would have bread as well as meat for their repast.

Morning came, and Nika with it, but he brought no corn with him.

"It was all spoiled," he told them. "It had rotted in the *cache*. None was fit to eat." But he had good news as well as bad, for upon their return they had sighted buffalo. These they had patiently followed for some distance, and had shot two. Nika had now come for the horses, that they might bring the meat into the camp to be dried and smoked. Then they could load their horses again, and proceed upon their journey.

"I will go with the horses, and help to bring back the meat," said Moranget, who was always eager for any hunting that might be going, and had some hopes of shooting buffalo himself.

La Salle made no objection. He sent both Saget and Nika with Moranget and the horses. They were instructed to bring back the meat that day if possible, and then it could be prepared in the camp, ready for transport as soon as they were able to start once more.

For some reason which he could not define, Jules was very uneasy. He wished that Moranget had not elected

to go—that La Salle had not permitted it. He could not have explained why he felt such a qualm of fear; but he took Saget privately aside and begged him, if possible, to keep beside Moranget, and to hold him back from any rash undertaking.

“I will try,” answered the servant at once. “But thou dost know that he will go his own way. He will scarce brook interference even from his uncle, still less from me; but I will keep beside him, and seek to hinder him from any rashness. What dost thou fear, good friend?”

“I know not,” answered Jules, with a little sigh. “I only know that my heart is heavy within me, and that I would we were all safe upon the banks of the great Mississippi, where we seem now to have friends from end to end, even though those be scattered and dispersed.”

Moranget, however, appeared troubled by no fears. He set forth gaily enough, and rode one of the horses—Saget and Nika following upon two others. The way lay over the sunny prairie, and the young man sang and shouted in the exuberance of his spirits. The love of adventure and travel was growing strong within him. He was in excellent spirits as he rode up to the place where the dead buffalo lay.

“Hullo!” he cried, as they approached the spot, “they have lighted fires. They have put up scaffolds! What is that for?”

“They must be drying the meat themselves, sir,”

answered Saget, and Nika nodded his head, but pursed up his lips in an expression of contempt for the ignorance of the white men; as the meat was not nearly dry enough for this operation, as he well knew through his long experience as a hunter.

“They will spoil it,” he said. “It will not be ready before to-morrow. It is madness to seek to smoke it yet.”

Moranget was of a quick and irritable temper, and these men were at all times obnoxious to him. Any handle of offence against them was at once taken hold of with eagerness and zest.

Clapping spurs into the horse, he rode recklessly into the midst of the party, and demanded in haughty and insolent tones what they professed to be doing.

Instantly an angry parley commenced. Duhaut replied with nonchalant contempt, bidding young Moranget mind his own business. He, furious at the tone adopted towards him, and made more angry still by observing that the hunters had set aside the marrow-bones and certain portions of the meat for themselves (to which, however, by the laws of forest hunting they had a full right), broke into violent abuse and recrimination. He rode his horse at the fire, scattering the embers right and left. His voice and manner became so violent and ungovernable, that Nika and Saget, after looking on awhile in dismay, strove by all the means in their power to pacify him. But they pleaded and soothed in vain. The reckless young man was in a most

thoughtless mood, and finally he seized upon the whole of the meat, including the reserved hunters' portions, piled it together in one great heap, and stood guard over it in his own person, his eyes flashing defiance, his face inflamed with passion.

Duhaut had suddenly lapsed into a silence that was far more really ominous than his original angry remonstrances. He drew aside with his companions, Liotot, Hiens, and Tessier—his own ill-favoured servant being of the group—and they seemed to confer together, but made no attempt to rescue the meat, nor to hinder their visitors from making themselves at home in the camp, as Moranget proceeded to do with an almost insolent air of familiarity.

It was growing too late to attempt to remove the meat that day. They must camp together here, and return upon the morrow. So much was agreed by all. Even Duhaut and his comrades raised no opposition. Indeed they seemed to have recovered their tempers; they spoke quite freely, and almost pleasantly, to Moranget and his companions, cooked provisions for them, and all ate together, and discussed plans for the next day, and how they should rejoin La Salle by an early hour in the morning.

Little did Moranget and his companions suspect the black treachery and murderous purposes lying dormant in the hearts of those men who were talking thus freely with them.

The night fell, and the watches were arranged.

It was never safe for all to sleep at once, but one sentinel could guard the camp, and each took his hour in turn. Moranget was to have the first, Saget the second, Nika the third. After that, Duhaut and his companions would take their turns. Each sentinel as his hour expired was to wake the next man, and so all the dark hours would be provided for.

Moranget kept his watch, roused Saget, and quickly fell asleep, wrapped in his blanket. Saget's turn being over, Nika relieved him, and when his hour expired, he too fell sound asleep beside his two comrades, Duhaut standing gun in hand over the sleeping camp.

Sleeping? It certainly seemed not. For hardly had the Indian servant fallen asleep between his companions, when, at a slight and almost imperceptible signal from Duhaut, the rest of the party sat up, and exchanged glances that boded no good to the sleeping men by the fire.

Liotot rose with a silent snake-like motion, holding in his hand a shining axe. He stood up and made a few silent passes with it in the moonlight, as though to test its balance.

"It will do its work," he muttered to himself; and then, whilst the rest looked on in breathless silence, he stole up towards the three sleeping figures, and stood over them like an avenging spirit.

Moranget was their enemy; but the curse of crime is that it involves the perpetrators in a succession of evil deeds, the second becoming needful to cover the

first. If Moranget died, Saget and Nika must die with him, else they would instantly flee with the tale to La Salle, and warn him.

Liotot hesitated not. Twice—thrice, the fatal axe descended. Nika and Saget never stirred. The blows took instant effect. They passed from the sleep of fatigue into the deeper sleep of death without a groan or a struggle. But Moranget was perhaps more alert. He might have heard through his slumbers the falling blows, for as Liotot struck at him, he moved, and the blow was not immediately fatal. He half sprang up, speechless, streaming with blood, and wildly threw out his hands, feeling as it were for his weapons.

“At him—finish him!” hissed Liotot to his comrades, anxious perhaps that they should also stain their hands in blood. They fell upon him like a pack of wolves. Each man had a blow for the hapless, haughty youth, who had succeeded in offending all. Moranget lay dead beside the forms of his hapless comrades; and Liotot, looking grimly down upon the motionless forms, whispered beneath his breath,—

“This is the beginning!”

Duhaut, standing beside him, and hearing his words, gave him a meaning look as he said,—

“After this there is no drawing back. La Salle must be the next!”

Then a deep silence fell upon the company. The floodgates of murder were thrown wide. The murderers had but one course open to them; and yet there was

something terrible even to them in the inevitable crime which their own actions had imposed upon them.

Away in the camp beside the river, La Salle awaited the return of the party with the buffalo meat. They came not; and being a little uneasy and a little surprised, he resolved upon the following morning to go forth in search of them.

Jules was his companion as usual. They knew the spot where the buffalo had been killed, for Nika had described it to them. It was not very far away, which made the delay on the part of the hunters the more remarkable.

It was a bright and beautiful morning, and yet a heavy weight seemed to hang upon the spirit of Jules. La Salle also was grave and thoughtful, and as the pair walked along, he again asked Jules if he had heard any complaints of late from the men as to his treatment of them.

Jules spoke of the incipient hostility growing up between Duhaut and his comrades and the rest of the party; but La Salle was too well used to small cabals amongst his turbulent followers to think seriously of the matter. Still he was grave and preoccupied, and sometimes heaved a sigh, as though some burden lay upon his spirit.

They came at last within sight of the camp. They did not at first see anybody about, but their attention was attracted by the rather sinister sight of some large birds circling overhead, as though scenting a prey somewhere in the bushes.

Neither spoke as this was observed, but both pushed on with some rapidity towards the spot indicated.

“There is Duhaut’s servant, l’Archevêque,” exclaimed Jules, suddenly, and there, sure enough, was the man, standing negligently beside a great clump of tall reed-like grass, with which the prairies were often covered. There was an air of insolence about him which raised the ire of Jules, and caused La Salle to speak to him with some sharpness.

“Where is my nephew, M. Moranget?” he asked incisively.

The man stretched himself leisurely, and made no reply. La Salle repeated his question in a tone that brooked no evasion.

“Strolling about somewhere; it’s no business of mine what he’s doing. You can go and look for him yourself!”

There was such studied insolence in the fellow’s manner and words that La Salle’s anger broke forth in a quick gust of passion.

“How now, sirrah! dost dare to take that tone with me? Thou mayest be the servant of another man; but all men upon this journey are my servants, and I brook no impertinence from any. Take heed that thou dost not feel the weight of my staff across thy shoulders—”

La Salle’s words came to a sudden close. The fellow addressed had drawn a little nearer to the clump of reeds. La Salle had taken several strides towards him, as though to inflict the threatened chastisement.

Suddenly there came two tiny puffs of smoke from the clump of reeds. La Salle threw up his arms and staggered forward. Before Jules could reach his side, he had dropped like a stone. A bullet had pierced his brain. That great heart, so full of ambition and high resolve, was still in the cold clasp of death.

A mist swam blood-red before Jules's eyes. He fell prone to the ground as though he too had received a bullet in his heart. He heard the sound of footsteps close beside them, he heard a brutal voice exclaim,—

“There thou liest, great Bashaw! the wolves and eagles will soon give thee fitting burial!”

He heard sounds as though the corpse were being kicked and stripped, but for a moment he lay as one dead, without power of life or motion. Then suddenly his energy returned. He sprang up, and saw that Duhaut and Liotot had indeed almost stripped the corpse of his master, and were flinging it contemptuously and brutally into the clump of reeds which had sheltered them in their assassin's work.

With a hoarse cry of horror and fury he sprang upon them, desiring only to die with his beloved master. At sound of his cry the murderers turned.

“I thought he was dead—the young dog!” cried one voice. The next moment Jules was dimly conscious of a crashing blow upon his head—sparks of fire danced before his eyes. He fell prone once more across the corpse of La Salle, and lay there as one dead.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STRANGE MEETING.

“**M**AYFLOWER!—Mayflower!—where art thou? I have such news! Is Father Fritz at home? I must tell him also. Mary, I believe I have heard of La Salle!”

Mary came quickly out of the house, her little boy clinging to her dress and toddling sturdily along. She looked at her husband in breathless expectancy.

“Gaspard, what sayest thou? Hast thou heard news of the great commander? Oh, tell me!—tell us!”

For at the sound of Gaspard’s eager cry many persons had come forth from their houses to hear the news. Claude had darted to fetch Father Fritz, who came forth quickly with the same look of eager interest upon his face. All were keenly eager to hear what news Gaspard had brought home.

“It may be but a false rumour,” he said. “The thing is hard to understand; for if the commander is here in very truth, why has he planted his colony so far away from the mouth of the Mississippi? Yet I have met with Indians who aver strenuously that white men are

there—over away in the west, at the mouth of one of the many smaller rivers that pour themselves into the great Gulf; and the chieftain of the tribe, who seems to be a man of some intelligence, declares that he is certain these settlers are not Spaniards, but Frenchmen.”

A murmur of surprise went round the circle of listeners.

“Did any speak the name of La Salle?” asked Louis, quickly.

“Not till we had ourselves asked of him,” answered Claude. “But when Swanalulu, who best understood their talk, spoke of him, they nodded their heads and grinned, as though in token that the name was familiar. But at least they all agree that Frenchmen are there—in some western region, many, many weary days’ march from here. It is hard to guess the actual distance from the accounts of Indians; and if I mistake not greatly, these men are some of La Salle’s colonists, even if he himself be not among them.”

Father Fritz was looking very thoughtful.

“It is possible,” he said. “If the king granted him means to fit out his longed-for expedition, he would have more than one vessel and crew with him. It is possible—very possible—that the ships have been separated, and that some amongst the colonists have landed far away from the true haven desired by La Salle. Or some dispute may have arisen to break up the party—there is no telling. We all know that such things have been before.”

These words carried with them a sense of sudden conviction to many hearts. It was indeed highly probable that the little armament (if such had been sent) had been parted and broken up by stress of weather, if not by strivings between those in command, and that a landing might have been made somewhere along the coast other than the spot desired and appointed by La Salle. The commander himself might possibly have miscalculated the distance he had to traverse. He was no trained sailor, albeit a man of great experience on land. The more this hypothesis was debated, the more probable did it seem that, if indeed these white men were French—and of that the Indians had been positive—they must surely belong in some way to La Salle and his long-projected expedition. Eager interest and excitement lighted the faces of the party as the matter was discussed, and Mary's voice was not the only one to cry,—

“But you will go in search of them! You will go and find them! You will not leave them alone in the wilderness leagues and leagues away from the desired haven!”

Gaspard smiled as he laid his hand caressingly upon her shoulder, and then upon the head of the child.

“I would set forth this very minute in search of my brother and of our great commander—for where one is, the other will surely be also. I await only the advice and permission of Father Fritz. I know that what he decides will be the best and wisest course to pursue.”

The little Jules catching some of the excitement of the moment, and dimly understanding that his father spoke of going away somewhere, stretched out his arms to him, and cried,—

“Jules too, Jules too!” which was one of the few sayings that his lips had learned to frame, and which he was fond of airing on every possible occasion, being resolutely determined to have his share in whatever might chance to be going on.

Gaspard took the bold little fellow in his arms. His sixteen months of fatherhood had not dulled within him the sense of wonder which continually possessed him at the mystery of childhood, and the joy of possessing a small image of himself to call him “father.”

He pressed his lips to the boy’s brow, and spoke with unwonted earnestness to him,—

“Jules must stay at home with mother, and take care of her. Father will go and fetch home Uncle Jules and the *Sieur de la Salle*.”

He spoke the words slowly and distinctly. It was one of the names they most desired the little one to learn to pronounce. He had never before attempted the feat, but now he suddenly cried out at the pitch of his shrill, little voice,—

“Vive La Salle!—Vive La Salle!”

This cry was taken up by all who stood by: a sudden wave of enthusiasm coming over the men of the Home of Peace, till they made the woods ring again with the name of the great adventurer.

Then they fell once more to discussion.

“Was any mention made of ships?” asked Father Fritz; and Swanalulu being appealed to, replied that the accounts of the Indians were very confused, and that some of their information was only hearsay; but they gave him to understand that there had been a vessel or vessels seen near the far-off river’s mouth some months before; but that they had sailed away now—some said one at least had been wrecked—and that the colony in the fort was quite cut off and alone, without hope of succour unless it should reach them by land. They might be well supplied with food—upon that point the Indians knew nothing. All they could absolutely vouch for was the presence of white men at some distant point westward along the coast, and that these settlers were French and not Spaniards.

“What must we do?” asked Gaspard, eagerly. “Should we not go in search of them?”

“Truly, I think so,” answered Father Fritz. “That is to say, a few of us will do so. But we must not go in great numbers. We cannot leave the women and children here defenceless in case of attack from Indians or Spaniards. We know that so soon as the Spaniards hear of any enterprise of the French along the Gulf of Mexico, they will seek to overthrow and bring it to nought. It may be that the vessels seen along the coast were their ships in pursuit of La Salle. Or it may be that they were La Salle’s ships in search of the mouth of this river, which he plainly missed. At any moment

we might hear of his safe arrival in the river's mouth; and we must not all be absent. He must have those here to bid him welcome and give him shelter, should he arrive in need and distress, as is like enough. We will therefore only send a small party by land, to seek for him at this new fort. The rest shall remain here—where he will doubtless seek us, if indeed he have not lost his way utterly in the mazes of the forest, and be awaiting relief from hence.”

All who knew the nature of the semi-tropical region of swamp and forest land which lay around the seaboard of the great Gulf well understood the difficulties and perils which beset travellers who would of necessity be unacquainted with the region, and perhaps hardly able to do more than strive to journey in one given direction.

It was by no means impossible that La Salle might have missed the mouth of the river, if he were dependent upon some incompetent or inexperienced sailing-master. If he had landed to the westward, he might well, after establishing his colony in temporary quarters, start with a small band of pioneers to seek the desired region. How joyfully, then, would he meet with a band of friends come forth in search of him! Gaspard's eyes kindled at the thought, and he pressed up to Father Fritz's side, and said,—

“Prithee, let me be one to go in search of the commander and my brother.”

“It shall be so, if you wish it,” answered Father

Fritz, looking with a smile from one brother to the other; for Claude had likewise advanced with the same unspoken request in his eyes, and Father Fritz well understood how much greater was the eagerness of those who had served under La Salle, and had come to reverence and love him, than that of men to whom he was little more than a name—albeit they regarded both him and his enterprise with great favour.

No large party could be spared from the valley, if a watch were also to be kept upon the river's mouth, as seemed advisable; but then there was no need for many to go, since travelling was safe enough for those who had dwelt long upon friendly terms with the Indians. They could get a few of the Kappas to accompany them, none being more faithful, better travellers, or more likely to pick up information from the westerly tribes as they journeyed on.

In two days the party was ready to start, and Mary made no trouble of Gaspard's leaving her. She felt that it was right he should go forth in search of his brother and the great La Salle. What joy to see him arrive in the Home of Peace, no matter what had been the hardships through which he had passed before!

“Would that brave Captain Tonty were here to join us!” cried Gaspard, as they stood in marching order; and Claude exclaimed eagerly,—

“Verily, if we find them, and return safe and sound, Swanalulu and I will make the voyage back up the river and take the glad tidings to him! Doubtless, for

such good news as that, he will even leave the rock and go to meet the commander. What a meeting it will be!”

“A foretaste, sometimes given to us here upon earth,” said Father Fritz, “of those wondrous meetings which lie before us when the Lord shall call us to Himself, either by His coming, or by the gentle hand of that death from whom He has robbed the sting, when we shall see again those who have gone before, or who are waiting in faith and joyful hope for the call of the Lord; and *then* we shall know that there will never be any parting beyond.”

“Ah, but do not let us think of death,” said Gaspard, with the natural confidence of youthful manhood. “Let us only think of the joy of finding those we love here upon earth—unless, indeed, the Lord come and take us all. That is even the greater joy. But with death let us make no covenant.”

Father Fritz smiled his gentle smile, and answered,—

“Let us indeed hope all things, believe all things, endure all things. That is the best preparation for what may lie in store for us. Leave all to the Lord, and let His holy will be ours.”

Claude gave him a quick and earnest glance, but said nothing then. Yet presently, as they marched along towards the river, which they must cross ere they reached the line of march settled upon, he asked with a touch of timidity and reserve in his voice,—

“My father, dost thou think that aught has gone amiss with our noble commander and his faithful followers?”

Father Fritz turned upon him the clear light of his steadfast blue eyes.

“Nay, my dear lad, of what lies before us in the future I have no knowledge. The Lord hides it from us, save now and again when for His own merciful purpose He lifts for a moment the veil. I am full of hope that we may find our brethren sound and well, and that our endeavours may be crowned with success. Yet I would keep ever in mind, and have you also to keep in mind, that earthly success is not always given to those who most strive after it, and who seem to us most to merit it. The Lord sees not as we see. His purposes work out in a fashion we wot not of. I would have us ever ready to submit our will to His, and to let no sorrow or disappointment have power to shake our faith or our confidence in His fatherly wisdom and love. When the veil is taken from our eyes; when it is given us—as I doubt not it will one day be given us—to see in some measure even as He sees, we shall know then that many deeds the world has called noble and mighty, have been but poor and paltry triumphs; whilst failure, disappointment, pain, and sorrow have led onwards and upwards to heavenly realms of which we have no conception now. In the Kingdom, how different will all things look! Let us never be cast down by trials now. Who knows that they are

not sent as the pledge and earnest of glory and happiness to come?"

Claude answered nothing, but he strove in his heart to be ready for whatever lay before them. Whether it should be success or sorrow, his heart should not fail him, nor be puffed up. He would hope all things, but he would strive to endure all things also.

The Kappa Indians were eager to do all they could, and were most excellent companions and scouts. Fleet of foot, well inured to forest journeys, and devoted to Father Fritz, they took upon themselves all the arduous labours, and the travellers were able to journey on at wonderful ease, and with great personal enjoyment.

The forest was beautiful; the rains, though they fell heavily at times, did not seriously incommode them. They fell in often with hunting parties from the western districts, and all they heard tended to confirm the tidings already received of the presence of Frenchmen away in the west.

Presently fresh news was brought in. A party of Indians affirmed that the white men were on the march, that they were coming in search of their brethren, and these men assured Father Fritz that, if he would only persevere in his present line of march for perhaps another week, he must certainly encounter them.

When questioned as to the number of the party, their answers were rather vague; but it was plain that it could not be a large one. Was La Salle himself of the number? They could not be sure, but they had

certainly heard the name. They thought he was there himself; if not, these were his followers.

Eager hope and joy now filled the hearts of all the party. They learned all they could from the Indians as to the line of march being taken by this company, and then arranged their own so as to be almost certain not to miss it.

The presence in the prairies of hunting parties of Indians made it probable that they would learn fresh news as they moved along, and so in fact it proved. For all the Indians who met them told them that they had seen white men, and many of them showed knives or beads or some small token, which proved beyond doubt that the party was moving onwards, and that it was not destitute.

Every day Gaspard arose with the hope in his heart of meeting his brother and La Salle. Every night as they made their camp, he spoke with confidence of entertaining guests upon the following night; and so they buoyed themselves up with hope from day to day.

Night had fallen. The camp had been pitched. The Indians kept their silent guard whilst the white men slept in confidence and peace. Suddenly the sound of a stealthy footstep broke the silence of the surrounding plain. The Indians started up and gazed about them in the direction of the sound. It came nearer and nearer. A dusky shape was seen creeping through the rank grass. Suddenly it rose up before them, and they beheld an Indian, clad in half-civilized garments, who

came forward making signs of friendliness, but was plainly in a condition of great exhaustion and fear.

When he heard that white men were in the camp, he uttered a cry of joy that awoke all. Gaspard and Claude were on their feet in an instant, and the next minute the man had been brought in, and was eagerly bidden to tell his tale.

It was one that caused all faces to blanch, and which set the whole camp in commotion.

This strange Indian was one of the followers of La Salle. He was greatly attached to Nika the hunter, and seldom, if he could help it, left him alone. His tale was this. When Nika had been sent forth by La Salle with Moranget and Saget to bring in the buffalo meat, this man had desired to be of the company, but had been refused. When, however, Nika did not return that night as had been expected, he grew very uneasy. He dared not take himself off so long as any remained awake in his camp; but after his own watch had been passed, when he had aroused the next man, he slunk off into the wilderness himself, resolved to track and find Nika and discover what detained him.

All this part of the story he explained at some length, and then he put his hands before his eyes as though to shut out some horrible sight. With many groans and tears he next proceeded to say how he saw the horrid death of Nika, Saget, and Moranget at the hands of Duhaut and his party. So terrified had he been by the sight of the white men slaying each other, that he had

quite lost his wits for the moment, and believing that his turn would come next, had fled for his very life far away into the forest, not returning to the camp of La Salle to give warning, as he should have done, but running on and on like a wild creature, till exhaustion came upon him, and he sank down on the ground and lay like a log till the shades of night came upon him.

He was roused by the presence of other Indians in the forest, and from them he learned that white men were near. He hardly knew in his confusion of mind whether it was La Salle's party he should find, or Duhaut's, or strangers; but he crept cautiously along till he could make out something, and then the eager desire to tell his tale to Frenchmen overcame all other feeling, and now he fell at their feet and implored them to come with him back to the camp, to reinforce the party there, lest the murderers should seek to add crime to crime, in order to escape the punishment so justly their due.

The man had no need to urge this upon them. They were as eager to start as he could wish them to be. Stirred to the heart by the news of this outrage, fearful and anxious lest more horrors should be impending, they lost not a moment in striking camp and starting forth under the escort of this man. As they marched at a rapid rate, they questioned him closely as to what he knew of the French colony in the west, and La Salle's undertakings there. He was able to tell them many things—how the colonists had been there a long time,

how La Salle had been hunting the country over and over in search of some great river which seemed always to elude him. The man himself had been one of those Indians who had placed themselves under the friendly protection of the French, and had gradually taken the place of servants and followers. He could speak a little broken French, and understand the Indian tongue familiar to this party, which had also been the medium of communication between him and La Salle. They made out from him that the colonists had passed through many hardships and were greatly reduced in numbers; but that La Salle was always confident of obtaining his goal, and never lost hope, although he had suffered hardship and disappointment enough to daunt any heart less stout than his. He always managed to secure the admiration and fidelity of the Indians, who regarded him almost in the light of a god. This man was no exception to the rule, and was confident that great success and glory would at last crown the endeavours of La Salle.

But what they heard of the temper of the pioneer party made all terribly anxious. That brutal murder could be done upon fellow-countrymen out in those lonely wilds was a thing most ghastly and terrible. It had filled the Indian's heart with fear and horror, and it was impossible not to see that if the Frenchmen began to slay each other from trumpery motives of jealousy, their prestige with the Indians would be gone for ever.

Through the remaining hours of the night they journeyed, pushing on with all possible speed. The dawn found them still many miles from the scene of the tragedy; but their guide told them they would reach it before the sun was at the meridian, and in spite of the heat of the plains, as the day advanced, they pushed resolutely on.

As is often the case, the way proved longer than the guide had thought; but at last the man halted, pointed to a clump of trees about a mile away, looked earnestly towards them, and then triumphantly at his companions, exclaiming,—

“There is the place! That is the place!”

With redoubled speed they pushed on. A very thin smoke-wreath curled up from the hollow towards which the Indian was making. As they drew nearer they walked with greater caution, their arms ready in case of attack, their eyes eagerly scanning the scene, wondering that there was no appearance of human life there save that one thin thread of smoke.

“They have fled!” spoke Gaspard, who a little in advance was striding on with the utmost haste. “Heaven send they have not gone back to the other camp with murder in their hearts, to finish there the work of blood begun here!”

“Is this the place?” asked Claude, with panting breath, as at last they stood beside the remains of the fire, and saw the ghastly traces of blood upon the ground. The bodies no longer lay there. Doubtless

they had been flung into the thicket, or perhaps given a rude burial. Gaspard looked round and saw the slow and sinister rise of a buzzard from a neighbouring thicket. The hoarse cry of some carrion bird also near the same spot sent a chill through his veins.

Without a word to the others he dived into the coarse reed grass, which showed signs of having been already trampled on that day.

Suddenly the air was rent by an agonised cry, which startled the rest of the party gathered round the dying fire, and caused a rapid move in the direction whence it had come.

“It was Gaspard’s voice!” cried Claude, bounding along with cheeks white through sudden fear and horror.

The rest were not slow to follow; yet ere they had reached the spot a second cry had gone up—a piercing cry of exceeding distress.

Father Fritz hurrying forward came upon a sad and terrible picture.

Gaspard and Claude had flung themselves upon their knees beside a half-stripped corpse. The white face and sightless eyes turned up as if in mute appeal to the heavens above were those of the man whom once to have seen was always to remember—Robert Cavalier de la Salle. Across his dead body lay another prostrate form, looking at the first glance as dead as the murdered man.

This was the faithful Jules, who for four years had scarcely left his master day or night, and who now

appeared to have sealed his devoted service by laying down his life to save the corpse from outrage.

Low, deep sobs were breaking from Claude's lips. Gaspard's face looked as if carved in marble, so white, so stern, so motionless.

Father Fritz stooped down beside the prostrate figure, and was silent for a few long seconds.

Then he lifted his head and said,—

“God be thanked! your brother Jules is living yet!”

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

WAS this some new world?.....Had merciful death swallowed him up?.....Was this the awakening which awaited the human soul within the gates of Paradise?.....What did it mean?.....Where was he?.....Perchance it was all some strange fitful dream, and he should awaken to find himself in the heart of the wilderness again.

Having got as far as this in his dim and hazy musings, Jules Dautray would generally close his tired eyes, and drop back in the condition of semi-consciousness and torpor in which he had remained now so long that some began to despair of his recovery.

But there came a day at last, when the sick man's eyes opened upon the world about him with a different look in their hollow depths. It was a sunny and beautiful day in the season after the winter rains, when the earth was looking its fairest and brightest. From where he lay upon a couch beneath the walls of a well-built house—a couch drawn out upon the wide veranda, where the sun could not touch him, but where the soft

winds of heaven could play freely round him—his eyes commanded a glorious prospect of wood and mountain and billowy green plain.

But about and around him were homelike sights and sounds. A dog lay at the foot of his couch. Domesticated animals cropped the green herbage beyond the paling which bordered the brilliant garden. And what was more wonderful still, a sturdy and beautiful little boy of some two and a half summers sat not far away from the end of the couch, alternately hugging a gambolling puppy, and plucking at the flowers within reach to make into posies which he tossed towards the couch, as if to place them out of reach of his playfellow.

Jules looked about him with dreamy wonder. He was dimly aware that his eyes had often opened upon some such scene as this, but that he had never yet made out what it meant nor where it was, nor how he came to be a spectator of it. He had vague recollections of being within house walls, of hearing kind and gentle voices round him, of being tended by soft hands, fed and cared for as young children are; but he had had no power to break the spell of deadly torpor which enveloped him like a garment. His eyelids had always seemed weighed down by leaden weights. His tongue had been too stiff and heavy in his mouth for speech to be possible. He had lost the ability to utter his floating fancies in articulate speech. He was not even certain whether he were himself—whether he were in or out of the body.

But to-day there was a change in these conditions. He suddenly felt the stirrings of life within him. He felt strangely weak, as though all his limbs were tied and bound by cords, but his brain was no longer weighted by that dull load of torpor. He could look about him, he could think, he could even speak, he thought, if he were to try; and fixing his eyes upon the little child beside him, he asked in a low, strange voice,—

“Who art thou, my little friend?”

The child looked up quickly, revealing a pair of dark eyes that made Jules involuntarily exclaim,—

“Gaspard!”

“I am Jules,” said the child, getting upon his feet. “It is my father who is Gaspard. I am little Jules, and thou art Uncle Jules.” And then he ran a few steps towards the door of the house and cried out, “Mother, mother! Uncle Jules is awake—and he called me Gaspard.”

From the open door there hurried out a sweet-faced woman with a babe in her arms, whom Jules seemed to recollect as a being seen in dreams and visions, but to whom he could give no name. Her face was full of eager interest and concern. She came and bent over him and touched his brow and wrist. Meeting the steady glance of his sunken eyes fixed upon her with the light of reason beaming in them, her face kindled joyously, and she exclaimed,—

“Dear Jules, thou art thyself! Thou art better.

Truly did Father Fritz say that he saw a change in thee, when none of the rest of us could see it."

Jules lay and looked at her with a strange sense of satisfaction.

"Father Fritz!" he repeated, in a wondering voice. "Methinks I should know that name. But I have forgot so much. Wilt thou not sit beside me and tell me somewhat of what all this means. It is as though I awoke in some new world. Even though thy face seems as the face of a friend, I know not how to name thee."

"I am thy sister Mary," she answered gently, seating herself at the foot of the couch. "I am thy brother Gaspard's wife. We have been wed these four years now, and we have lived in the Home of Peace with Father Fritz, happy and safe, and at peace with all men. It is a beautiful life. I would all men could share it. Thou wilt be one of us now, my brother, and this is now thy home."

Memory was returning to Jules; but though it came upon him as a sudden flood, there was still too much merciful deadening of the faculties for the tide to overwhelm him, as Mary almost feared. She saw by his eyes that he was thinking—that the powers of mind were asserting themselves over the long numbing of the faculties which had threatened to dull his mind for ever. She almost trembled as she watched him, fearing a return of the fever flush, and a lapse into that delirium which had so often threatened to extinguish the feeble spark of life.

But on the contrary, to-day he lay quite still and tranquil. Little Jules threw down the posies beside him, and he touched them with tender, feeble fingers, looking sometimes at the child, sometimes at Mary, but thinking, thinking, thinking all the while, as she could see, till at last he spoke once more.

“It is not all a dream, is it? The great La Salle is dead?”

“Alas, yes, killed by treacherous hands in the wilderness—the same hands as almost took thy life, dear brother. But though thou hast lain a long time at the gates of death, methinks the Lord has given thee back to our prayers.”

“How came I here?” asked Jules. “I remember the place well now. It is the haven nigh to the great river, where we looked always to find friends. But I fell beside him far away in the wilderness. How, then, came I hither?”

“Thy brothers and Father Fritz had gone in search of La Salle and his party. The Indians had brought tidings that Frenchmen were on the coast of the bay. They reached you not in time to save the noble La Salle from his fate; but thou wert yet living, and though for long it seemed as though thou wouldst die too, yet they never despaired, and with many halts, and after many months had passed by, they returned with thee hither. And here thou hast lain ever since—all through the hot summer, the winter rains, till now, when the glad springtide is again upon the earth, and it

is even as Father Fritz has taught us to hope. The reviving of nature has brought revival to thee, and thou wilt be once more thyself."

Whilst Jules lay pondering over this speech, recalling a hundred scenes of wilderness life—and, above all, the fearful closing scene, branded on his brain in characters of fire, when his master fell to the ground pierced by the treacherous bullet of the hidden foe—Mary whispered to her little boy, who trotted off across the sunny enclosure; and in a few minutes the venerable form of Father Fritz appeared, his snow-white hair glistening in the sunlight, his kind eyes and tender strong face instinct with lively emotion.

Jules saw his approach, and strove to lift himself.

"Bless me, even me also, O my father!" he exclaimed, as though the words were forced from him by some sudden gust of emotion.

Solemn and tender was the blessing he received. Mary and the child slipped away into the house, and Father Fritz took her vacant place.

"Tell me more," pleaded Jules, with tranquillity, yet with some urgency of manner. "What more didst thou find in the wilderness? Dost thou know aught of the fate of those murderers? Dost know if they had other victims than the four slain within those few hours—those fatal hours?"

"My son, those murderers met the fate that such as they draw down upon their heads. Glutted with slaughter, and half afraid of what they had done, they

added no fresh victims to the roll of slain. The Abbé Cavelier and the rest implored mercy and submitted to Duhaut as their leader, but the murderers ere long fell out amongst themselves, and Duhaut and Liotot were shot by their comrades. Of these, some fled to the Indians and have since been lost sight of, whilst the abbé and a few more fell in with the party we had sent in search of any who might need assistance, and joined our camp. We were able only to travel very slowly on account of thy condition, my son, for the fever came again and again, and many times it seemed as though we must bury thee away in the wilderness, as though it would be impossible for thee to endure the journey. But the Kappa Indians were our good friends and allies through all. They carried thee in a swinging hammock whenever thou couldst bear it, and brought thee across rivers and over burning plains with a skill and patience that won our gratitude and love. The abbé and the rest of the few followers of La Salle came with us, and at last we reached the Home of Peace. Here thou hast lain ever since; but they went up the river, still under the guidance and escort of the friendly Kappas, so soon as they were rested and refreshed. For they had had enough of these southern wilds, and were anxious to get to Canada, and so back to France. Without the dauntless energy and genius of La Salle, his project must needs fall to the ground. It was ably planned; but perchance it was beyond the present powers of man to realize so great a scheme. He has fallen in the

wilderness—a great-hearted, noble-minded man. Future ages will give him honour and praise. But in his lifetime failure and disappointment were his portion.”

Jules heaved a long sigh ; but physical weakness hindered him from feeling too keenly the grief that else might have borne him down. He had been near enough to the gates of death to have come to regard mundane matters as of less paramount importance. He could not have explained the feeling, but he was conscious that it underlay his thoughts about these things now.

“ And Captain Tonty—does he know ? ”

“ Thy brother Claude set forth to carry him the news, even when the Abbé Cavelier commenced his journey up the river. They were to travel together as far as St. Louis, after which Claude purposed to return hither. We looked for him back ere now. But doubtless delays have arisen. Perchance he has remained awhile at the colony of St. Louis ; but we shall see him back in the Lord’s good time, if it be His will to send him.”

“ And Gaspard ? ”

“ Gaspard is here. He has journeyed once to the far-off colony on the bay, which they have also called St. Louis, in memory of a king who seems to think little enough of his hapless subjects stranded on distant shores. A few of the survivors returned with him ; but the most were too downhearted and timid to face the journey through the wilderness. They looked still for help by sea from France, and preferred the present comfort and safety of their little town to any further

journeyings. I fear me that fever, or the Spaniards, or even the Indians, will soon make short work of them, and sweep them from off the face of the earth. But the poor creatures refused the only help we could offer them. I fear me they have chosen death and not life (as too many of us do, whether we know it or not), and that they will all perish in the wilderness.”

Jules heaved a long sigh. It seemed a melancholy termination to that grand expedition which had sailed so hopefully from France to effect the subjugation of a new world—La Salle lying in a nameless grave in the trackless wilderness; three-fourths of his men likewise lying scattered up and down these wild regions; a handful of miserable exiles clinging to the hope of a rescue by sea; a few more wending their weary way to Canada with the news of the utter wreck of all their fond hopes.

“*Sic transit gloria mundi*,” spoke Father Fritz, softly, seeming to read the thoughts of his heart, and Jules only replied by a quick and eloquent glance.

Days and weeks rolled away. The invalid recovered his strength in a satisfactory if not very rapid fashion. He remained a very silent man, thin, worn, and haggard. He was often seen with little Jules upon his knee, talking earnestly to him, telling him stories, to which the boy listened with breathless eagerness, and strove to relate afterwards to his parents. Sometimes he talked a little with Father Fritz, but for the most part he was a very silent man—more like the old taciturn Jules of

boyish days than he had been since roused by the excitements of travel. But he was always loving and gentle to Gaspard and Mary, seeking to serve them in every way he could, and growing into a place in that household from which they soon felt they would never be able to spare him.

Nor did he show any desire to go. He had lost all ambition for further pioneer work. With the death of La Salle had died within him the desire after colonization and exploration. The Home of Peace, with its daily round of duties and devotions, its unostentatious missionary work amongst the natives around, its simple life of brotherly love, satisfied him completely. He came in time to attach himself to Father Fritz almost as he had done to La Salle, and asked nothing better than to follow him upon his rounds whenever he travelled to his converts in outlying districts. His knowledge of the life of the wilderness and of Indian speech and ways made him always a valuable companion, and in the absence of Claude and Swanalulu (who had both gone to the rock of St. Louis) the father was glad indeed of his company, and the bond between them grew ever closer and more close.

But where was Claude all this while?—and where was the *Sieur de Tonty*? Long absences were not wont to excite undue anxiety amongst those who knew the uncertainty of travelling and the many hindrances which might arise in traversing such vast distances; but towards the end of that year a little uneasiness was

growing up in the minds of the community in the Home of Peace, and Gaspard had spoken more than once of going in search of his brother.

But that was not needed after all; for one day, just as the shadows were beginning to lengthen and the daylight to wane, a little band of travellers was seen approaching the gateway, and Gaspard, hastening forth to meet and greet them, uttered a quick cry of joy, for he found himself face to face with his brother Claude and the faithful ally of La Salle, Henri de Tonty!

What was there not to hear and to tell?

Claude, it seemed, had fallen ill of a fever at Fort Prud'homme, and had remained behind with Swanalulu to recover, whilst the abbé and his party had gone onwards. These had dismissed the Indians shortly before reaching the rock of St. Louis, their reason being apparently that for some cause or other they were afraid to announce the death of La Salle, and declared him to be still in the south.

Tonty himself was away, engaged in warfare with the Iroquois; but Boisrondet was ruling the colony in his absence, and, of course, received the tidings of La Salle's presence at the mouth of the Mississippi with satisfaction and pleasure. Tonty himself had encountered the abbé as he returned from his victorious campaign, and heard the same falsehood from him also.

He returned to his rock, and was in eager anticipation of direct communication from his chief, when Claude arrived with the dread tidings of woe.

That the deathblow to all thoughts of colonization had been struck at the moment when La Salle was laid low, Tonty could not seriously doubt; but yet he resolved to make one attempt to see if anything could be done, or at least to visit and perhaps rescue the hapless exiles in the other St. Louis. Boisrondet would continue to hold the rock and govern the upper colony in his absence, and it was hard for one so sanguine and devoted as Tonty to give up hope all at once.

Sitting at Father Fritz's table, with the Dautrays gathered round, this scheme was discussed again and again. Jean Dautray had accompanied Tonty southwards in the eager desire to see all his sons once again, and perhaps to settle with them in the Home of Peace. It had been a wonderful meeting—Jules given back as from the dead; Gaspard with a wife and two beautiful children to display to the proud, fond grandfather. Private joy had almost for the moment blotted out the thought of loss and disappointment. There were bright faces as well as grave ones around the board that night.

Gaspard told of his visit to the colony, and of the despondent and unadventurous spirit prevailing there. Tonty shook his head. He was well able to understand it. Yet he still desired to pay a visit there, the last tribute of faith and devotion which he could ever show to his dead master.

“I will visit his grave in the wilderness, and see the people he has left behind, if haply I can do aught for them,” he said. “And then I will return to St. Louis

in the north, and await the commands of His Majesty of France. It may be we shall be helped; it may be we shall be deserted, and that I may return to this peaceful place and ask for a home here. But let me at least do my duty so long as any is left to me. That is all that remains to me now."

He was silent a while, and then spoke slowly and dreamily the same words that Father Fritz had uttered not many months before upon this very subject,—

"*Sic transit gloria mundi!*"

"True, my children, very true," answered Father Fritz, looking round with his earnest, shining eyes upon the group around him. "Let us therefore lift up our hearts in thankfulness and joy in the knowledge that the glories which shall be revealed at the coming and kingdom of the Lord are glories which shall pass not away, but are eternal as the faithful promises of the Lord Himself; and His last promise to His faithful children is this—Surely I come quickly. Amen."

THE END.

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